



The gift in Antiquity

Edited by Michael L. Satlow

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The Gift in Antiquity

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Series Editor's Preface

The Ancient World: Comparative Histories

The purpose of this series is to pursue important social, political, religious, economic, and intellectual issues through a wide range of ancient or early societies, while occasionally covering an even broader diachronic scope. By engaging in comparative studies of the ancient world on a truly global scale, this series hopes to throw light not only on common patterns and marked differences, but also to illustrate the remarkable variety of responses humankind developed to meet common challenges. Focusing as it does on periods that are far removed from our own time, and in which modern identities are less immediately engaged, the series contributes to enhancing our understanding and appreciation of differences among cultures of various traditions and backgrounds. Not least, it thus illuminates the continuing relevance of the study of the ancient world in helping us to cope with problems of our own multicultural world.

The origins of the present volume lie in a conference held at Brown University in May 2010. Thanks go to the Program in Ancient Studies (now Program in Early Cultures), the primary sponsor, to all others who offered financial and logistical support, and to Michael Satlow, who initiated the project, recruited a stellar cast of contributors, shaped the conference into an intellectually challenging and greatly stimulating event, and now presents the proceedings in a volume that will force many to adjust their thinking and is certain to prompt further debate.

Earlier volumes in the series are *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub, 2007); *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (eds. John Bodel and Saul Olyan, 2008); *Epic and History* (eds. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, 2010); *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-modern Societies* (eds. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J. A. Talbert, 2010); *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (eds. Johann P. Arnason and Kurt A. Raaflaub, 2011); *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-modern World* (eds. Susan E. Alcock, John Bodel, and Richard J. A. Talbert, 2012). Other volumes are in preparation: *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy*:

A Politico-cultural Transformation and Its Interpretations (eds. Johann P. Arnason, Kurt A. Raaflaub, and Peter Wagner); *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World* (ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub); and *Peace in the Ancient World: Concepts and Theories* (ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub).

Kurt A. Raaflaub

Preface

This volume had its origin in a conference on “The Gift in Antiquity” held at Brown University on May 2–4, 2010. The conference was generously funded by the Program in Ancient Studies (now the Program in Early Cultures) and was co-sponsored by the Departments of Religious Studies and Classics, the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology in the Ancient World, the Herbert Goldberger Lectureship Fund, and the Program in Judaic Studies. I am grateful to all of these units. A special word of thanks is due to Kurt Raaflaub for his truly exceptional support throughout the entire process of both the conference and the editing and publication of this subsequent volume.

Special thanks are also due to Jody Soares and Tracy Miller. Jody, in the Office of University Events and Conference Services, was invaluable in helping to make the conference such a collegial and productive experience. Tracy, in the Program for Judaic Studies, efficiently handled with a smile many of the financial and logistical issues associated with both the conference and the production of this volume.

Most of all, though, I thank the conference participants and contributors to this volume. They each reached beyond their own areas of specialization to help create a dynamic intellectual conversation, orally and in print. They made my job, as an editor, easy and enriching.

The abbreviations of classical sources in this volume follow Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, eds, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Abbreviations of Jewish and Christian sources, except where noted, follow P. H. Alexander, J. F. Kutsko, and J. D. Ernest, *et al.*, eds, *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). The authors have followed conventional schema for transliteration with occasional changes to enhance readability.

Michael L. Satlow
November, 2012

Introduction

MICHAEL L. SATLOW

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a gift is “something, the possession of which is transferred to another without the expectation or receipt of an equivalent; a donation, present.” By definition, gifts are thus set apart from commercial exchange. An item or service can be sold, bartered, or gifted; the terms denote distinct forms of transactions (if the gift can even be called that). You cannot pay me to give you a gift.

I doubt that most people today, at least in the developed world, would contest this definition. Yet faced with just a few simple and practical questions, the very same people who would define a “gift” as an act of giving “without the expectation or receipt of an equivalent” would also immediately recognize the insufficiency of that answer. When I give a birthday “gift” to another adult, do I really not expect to receive a gift in return at some point? When I give a gift to a child, don’t I expect at least acknowledgment and gratitude? When I bring a bottle of wine or bouquet of flowers to a dinner to which I was invited, is it really a “gift,” or a token exchange that functions to reflect gratitude for the invitation? If I bring an unexpected gift to the same dinner – say, a package of lingerie – how would it be interpreted? Why do extravagant gifts between social unequals, particularly in the workplace, make us uncomfortable? When I donate money to a charity, must I receive no benefit, whether material or emotional, for it to count as a “gift”?

These very simple thought experiments highlight three complex characteristics of the gift. First, context matters. To understand the true nature of a gift, we must know the age, gender, status, and social class of both giver and receiver. The occasion matters as well: Is the gift given as part of a private family celebration, a

more formal cocktail party, or a ceremonial state visit by dignitaries? Indeed, the United States Department of State maintains a Protocol Gift Unit, which tracks such official gifts. To call the transfer of property a “gift” can also have very concrete ramifications in a court of law. I cannot later demand goods or services in exchange for money that I designated as a gift.

Second, the gift itself is not random. With rare exceptions, the actual gift or service is very carefully calibrated to its context. Societies not only have expectations for when and where gifts are to be made but also for the very thing (or range or class of things) to be given. My gift-giving is embedded in a much wider web of relationships, contexts, and social expectations. It is hardly the free and spontaneous act implied by the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Finally, though, this very gap between our understanding of the “ideal” gift and real gift-giving practices is socially productive, even necessary. It enables us, for example, to carve out separate domestic and commercial spheres. Gifts are not commercial transactions. At the same time, by deliberately “misrecognizing” transactions as gifts we can blur these very spheres in socially and psychologically useful ways. Few, for example, would want to characterize their gifts to significant others as transactional, no matter what our expectations.

Thinkers in antiquity already recognized this tension between the gift as it “ought” to be and as it really is. In the first century CE, the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca composed a long and detailed essay that for all intents and purposes theorizes the gift. In this essay, *De beneficiis*, Seneca astutely observes that “people must be taught to give benefits freely, receive them freely, and return them freely. ... Donors must be taught not to keep accounts; recipients must be taught that they owe even more than they have received” (1.4.3; Seneca 2011: 22). The essay, which is putatively addressed to the appropriately named Aebutius Liberalis, provided a guide to navigating the social minefield of gift-giving and exchange in Roman society. His discussion includes all of the issues mentioned above: the importance of the relative social statuses of donor and recipient; the nature of the gift itself; the intention behind the gift and how that intention is conveyed. According to Seneca:

We have to take account of the recipient’s social role. For some gifts are too small to come from important men; others are too big for the recipient. So compare the role of each and assess in that context the gift you plan to give, to see if it is too great or too small for the giver or whether, on the other hand, the prospective recipient might either turn up his nose at it or not be able to handle it. (2.15.3; Seneca 2011: 42)

Much of Seneca’s advice could in fact easily be transferred to modern social relations.

Seneca’s tract is probably the most complete and sustained reflection from antiquity on gift-giving, but it is far from being the only one. A couple of centuries after Seneca we find Jewish rabbis, in Palestine and Babylonia, debating about the definition of a gift in a legal context: if a gift is really a loan, is it a gift? One of their

fuller discussions of this issue occurs in the context of considering the requirement that on the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), each Jew must possess his own *lulav* (palm frond, with some branches from other vegetation). The rabbis illustrate the legal problem with a story:

Once, Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Akiva were coming in a boat and only Rabban Gamaliel had a *lulav* that he had bought for 1,000 *zuz* [a *zuz* is equivalent to a Roman dinar or a Greek drachma]. Rabban Gamaliel waved it and thus fulfilled his obligation, and he gave it to Rabbi Joshua as a gift. Rabbi Joshua waved it and fulfilled his obligation and then gave it as a gift to Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah waved it and fulfilled his obligation and gave it as a gift to Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva waved it and fulfilled his obligation and returned it to Rabban Gamaliel. (Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 41b; my translation)

The Talmud, though, immediately recognizes the problem: “Why would [the story] read ‘returned it’? It means to teach incidentally. Thus we learn: A gift given on condition that it be returned is still called a ‘gift.’” Gifts are not always what they seem to be.

Of far more legal consequence are the gifts given in contemplation of death. For the rabbis, gifts of property that are meant to circumvent the statutory laws of inheritance, which are based on explicit biblical commands, were deeply troubling, even as they recognized their utility. The result was a fairly complex and self-conscious body of rabbinic law meant to balance “gifts” with “inheritance.” The problem was slightly different for Roman jurists, although they too self-consciously wrestled with this problem (Yaron 1960).

Even the theological appropriation of the notion of “gift” by early Christians grapples with the idealized “gift” in light of the implications of actual social practices. Hence Paul, in less uncertain terms than usual, appropriates the notion of the gift to describe Christ’s death:

But the free gift is not like the trespass [of Adam]. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:15–17; NRSV translation)

In this brief passage, Paul emphasizes no fewer than four times that Christ was a “gift” (*dōrea*). While he does not develop a full theology of the gift, Paul is here pointing toward the notion that God gave to humanity the gift of Christ and the grace or salvation that he brings. There is certainly an unresolved tension here: on

the one hand, Paul asserts that God gave Christ freely and expects nothing in return. On the other hand, Paul certainly thinks that we owe God for this gift and that God too expects our appreciation and piety in return (Crook 2004: 139–48). Paul is struggling with the nature of this gift.

Yet as Daniel Caner argues in his essay in this volume, there was an entire gift economy in late antiquity that was marked precisely by Christians giving gifts to God – whether through donations to ecclesiastical authorities or to the poor. Were these gifts in payment to God for goods already rendered or were they meant to put the donor in God’s (i.e., the church’s) favor? The theological problem that this presented to ecclesiastical authorities became acute enough that they developed an extensive terminology for sorting out which gifts were really not gifts at all, and which were.

Paul was certainly not the first or the only person in antiquity to link gifts to the nonvisible realm. The Hebrew Bible at times understands “sacrifices” as gifts to God. As in the case of the late-antique church, in practice these gifts went through the hands of religious experts. Similarly, Greeks typically brought offerings or votives to established temples to repay the gods for some benefit that had been given (e.g., Rouse 1902). Grave goods too are often understood as gifts to the dead spirits, although this is a notion that both Nicola Denzey Lewis and Karen Stern will challenge in this volume. Are these true “gifts,” meant neither to repay a prior service nor confer future benefits?

In antiquity, as today, political entities as well as individuals and families both gave and received gifts. A Hellenistic city, for example, might “give” a gift to another city or inscribe an honor for a generous citizen (e.g., Domingo Gygax in this volume). Cities frequently presented gifts to rulers of hostile armies. Or are they bribes, and if so, why are they frequently called “gifts”?

The gift, whether as an idealized notion, a set of social practices, or a discourse or theorization that seeks to reconcile the two, is thus hardly self-evident. Indeed, given the wide diversity of meanings and practices encompassed by the concept of the gift, does it make sense for scholars even to use the category as an analytical one?

* * *

According to the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), the answer to that question is clearly affirmative.

Mauss, the nephew of Émile Durkheim, began his teaching career in 1900 at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris, soon moving from a temporary position to the chair of “religions of uncivilized peoples” (Fournier 2006: 85–89). In 1930 he was also elected to a chair at the prestigious *Collège de France*. Both the breadth and the impact of Mauss’s intellectual contributions remain impressive. Mauss closely collaborated with his uncle, essentially establishing in France the new discipline of sociology. As indicated by the name of his chair, he developed an intense interest in “primitive” religion. While seeking (at times unsuccessfully) to steer clear of the common value judgment of his day that invidiously distinguished

between the lesser “primitive” and the higher “civilized” Europe, Mauss became interested in the “elemental” forms of religious life and phenomena. This in turn led him to ethnology, and while he himself had very limited experience in the field, he helped to establish the methodological standards for this emerging discipline. Mauss played a foundational role in the modern study of sociology, ethnology, anthropology, and religion.

In 1898, with his friend and collaborator Henri Hubert, Mauss published “Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice” in the second volume of *Année sociologique*, the founding journal of French sociology he edited with Durkheim (Hubert and Mauss 1898). In this essay, Hubert and Mauss sought to define “sacrifice” and expose its fundamental (or elemental) “grammar.” “Sacrifice,” they wrote, is a procedure that “consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, that is, of a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed” (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 97). This definition gingerly straddles the line between the understanding current in his day that the purpose of sacrifice was a one-time exchange between humans and the divine and that it created an ongoing relationship. Moreover, Hubert and Mauss argued that sacrifice can be understood only within a social context: “The sacred things in relation to which sacrifice functions, are social things” (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 101). Sacrifice, like all religious phenomena, is embedded in the social; all are “social facts.”

Mauss was clearly preoccupied with these two interrelated issues of reciprocity and religion as a “social fact.” Having developed his ideas in a series of courses and lectures, Mauss published his “Essai sur le don” (later translated into English as *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*) in 1923–1924, again in the *Année sociologique*. This relatively thin essay grew out of and subsumed his work on sacrifice. According to Mauss, there is no “free” gift. All gifts are embedded in a set of social relationships and obligations. The obligations are “to give, to receive, to reciprocate” (Mauss 1990: 39). The purpose of the gift is thus to create group cohesion by establishing an ongoing cycle of gift-exchange. These practices constitute a “system of total services”:

First, it is not individuals but collectivities that impose obligations of exchange and contract upon each other. ... Moreover, what they exchange is not solely property and wealth, movable and immovable goods, and things economically useful. In particular, such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one element, and in which the passing on of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract. Finally, these total services and counterservices are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts, although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory, on pain of private or public warfare. (Mauss 1990: 5)

Two other aspects of *The Gift* deserve note. First, much of Mauss’s theory was based on his reading of ethnographies of Polynesian and Melanesian societies and Northwest Native American tribes. From the former he developed the idea that

originally objects were thought to possess an animate soul, or *hau*, that related the thing back to its original owner: “To accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul” (Mauss 1990: 12). From the latter he was struck by the “potlatch,” in which material is extravagantly but ceremoniously transferred and even destroyed. The potlatch, Mauss argues, is a total social system in which gifts serve to create and reinforce social bonds, hierarchies, and identity.

Second, the essay suggestively contrasts “archaic” gift-exchange with the modern economy. The modern, monetized economy assumes a *homo oeconomicus*, a human whose calculations are always “constant, icy, utilitarian” (Mauss 1990: 76). Mauss’s socialist leanings come out in this section. The icy calculations of capitalism need to be tempered and reinserted back into the system of total services. Mauss strangely ends his essay with the story of King Arthur’s legendary Round Table. “Peoples, social classes, families, and individuals will be able to grow rich, and will only be happy when they have learnt to sit down, like the knights, around the common store of wealth” (Mauss 1990: 83).

Mauss’s essay has been the subject of intense study and criticism. Like most scholars of his time, he presupposes an evolutionary schema (from “archaic” to “civilized”) that has now long been outdated, even if he romantically valorizes the archaic. He was an astute reader of ethnographies, but he was still a reader; he had not actually seen the societies about which he writes. His lack of reference to Seneca is, at minimum, odd, considering the similarity of some of their formulations (Heim 2004: 33–35). More critically, his denial of the existence of a “free gift” has been extensively challenged (Parry 1986; Derrida 1992; Weiner 1992; Testart 1998; Laidlaw 2000).

But the value of his essay has largely endured, and many modern social theorists continue to build on his ideas (see the essays in Osteen 2002). Claude Lévi-Strauss, who attended some of Mauss’s courses, extended his ideas to demonstrate the importance of reciprocity to anthropological research. The notion that societies exchange (whether things or marriage partners) and create rules for individual exchange with the purpose of creating and reinforcing social bonds has become commonplace.

Classicists and other students of antiquity have also found Mauss’s ideas to be fruitful. Reciprocity is now seen as a major key to understanding Homer (Seaford 1994; Wagner-Hasel 2006). Scholars working on ancient social relations (MacMullen 1974; Peachin 2011), religion (e.g., Linders and Nordquist 1987; Parker 1998), and literature also regularly appeal to anthropological notions of reciprocity.

Today, Mauss’s essay *The Gift* is best appreciated less as a general theory than as providing a set of questions as well as a heuristic category through which we may observe antiquity from a distinctive perspective. Reconsidering Mauss’s essay requires that we step back from the general and broad notion of “reciprocity” to focus on the “gift.” Ancient cultures had words and concepts that we can rather unproblematically understand as gift. Mauss asks us to consider both how these cultures deployed these concepts in their wider social contexts and whether or how such a comparison of gift terminology and practices between ancient (and modern) societies might be enlightening.

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A conference was convened at Brown University on May 2–4, 2010, to consider how Mauss’s notion of the gift might be useful for examining issues in ancient studies. Primarily supported by the Ancient Studies program (now the Program in Early Cultures) at Brown, the main goal of the conference was to foster a cross-cultural, multidisciplinary conversation under the rubric of “the gift.” This volume contains most of the papers presented at that conference plus two other solicited essays (by David Konstan and Sarah Stroup). It is the first publication to deal broadly with using Mauss’s understanding of the gift for the study of the ancient Mediterranean.

These essays use Mauss “to think with,” and when read in dialogue with each other and Mauss, they bring into relief several overarching dimensions of how the gift, as discourse and practice, functioned throughout the ancient Mediterranean and West Asia. Here I would like to highlight four of those dimensions, which serve also as the organizational schema of this volume.

First, not all gifts were the same. In his opening essay, Marcel Hénaff helpfully develops a tripartite typology of the gift, arguing that Mauss focused primarily on only one of these types, the “ceremonial” gift that facilitates the mutual recognition between human communities. If Mauss overemphasized this type of gift, scholars today, especially of antiquity, perhaps overemphasize a second type that characterizes personal reciprocal gifts. The term “Mediterranean society” is sometimes used to broadly signal that a strict, almost mechanical reciprocity – *do ut des* (“I give so that you may give”), the idea that there was no free gift – was foundational in the Greek and Roman worlds (cf. Veyne 1976; Silber, this volume). Yet these essays show that this is a gross oversimplification. Greeks, Romans, Christians, Jews, and ancient Israelites all had a notion of the “free gift,” an offering given without expectation of repayment. Caner, for example, shows that Christians in late antiquity developed a highly complex and nuanced vocabulary for gift-giving, in fact, much like Seneca, theorizing the gift (cf. Wagner-Hasel; Gardner).

Second, the different notional categories of the gift are less important for what they tell us about actual gift-giving practices in antiquity than for the uses to which these ancient societies deployed them as discourse. Hellenistic cities, Marc Domingo Gygax argues, developed a discourse of gift-giving that was critical to maintaining the precarious balance between the polis and its wealthier members, who were expected to give “freely” to support municipal needs. Yet such a deployment of discourse was not limited to the public sphere. Zeba Crook demonstrates how the language of “gift” was integrally connected to that of “friendship,” and how both were manipulated in order to achieve larger social goals. Asymmetrical exchanges between social unequals, Crook argues, often mask the work that they do in reinforcing social hierarchies. Fictive friends give “fictive” gifts. Just as discourse about the gift played an important role in ordering the social relations between elite men, so too was this discourse (or at least its use by poets and

playwrights) deployed in the domain of love. Ovid, as Neil Coffee argues, plays with it in order to distinguish between a prostitute and a lover; only the former would insist on “gifts” for her sexual favors. A similarly playful deployment of this tension informed Terence’s play *The Eunuch*, and, as David Konstan argues, can be traced back to Aristotle.

Third, gift-giving is indeed best seen, as Mauss suggested, as a “total social fact” in antiquity. Gifts not only establish “recognition” between human groups (see Hénaff), they also play an important and highly calibrated role in creating and reinforcing social hierarchies within each community. Sarah Stroup demonstrates how elite Roman men chose to give books (among other things) to each other. The choice was hardly arbitrary; they conveyed cultural meanings that helped to reinforce class solidarity. Gifts to the dead, Nicola Denzey Lewis argues, served a similar function. Roman grave offerings were not “gifts” to the dead: they were meant to signal one’s social status to the living while reinforcing class identity and solidarity. A similar kind of signaling occurred in the Jewish cemeteries of Beth She’arim, according to Karen Stern. Here too, the “gifts” (used here to denote the apotropaic graffiti often found in these burial caves) were intended as signs for the living rather than the dead, in this case of filial devotion.

At the same time that gift-giving practices reinforced social classes, they also created potentially explosive tensions within and between them. In somewhat different ways, both the ancient Greeks and the rabbis recognized and attempted to address this issue. Solon, according to Beate Wagner-Hasel, legislated marriage gifts in order to dampen competition and to symbolically reinforce the idea that Athenians of all classes constituted a single community. Almost a millennium later, the rabbis wrestled with a similar problem: how can one reconcile a sense of a single community of “Israel” with their understanding that charity to the poor actually creates separate communities based on class? Gregg Gardner argues that to resolve this tension the rabbinic jurists sought at times to distinguish charity from gifts, classifying the former instead as a kind of fictive loan and thus preserving the illusion that the transaction was between equals.

Finally, gifts to the gods radically expanded the “total social fact” to include the realm of the divine. Anne Katrine Gudme argues that it is insufficient and too mechanistic to argue that biblical vows are simply attempts to gain favors from God. The true purpose of such vows to the biblical God was to help nurture a continuing and more mutually beneficial relationship between the parties. Gifts to the gods, though, frequently involve several parties. According to Ilana Silber, Peter Brown, building on Paul Veyne’s influential study of euergistic giving, argues that religious giving in late antiquity creates a new configuration, “with intricate relations of interpenetration, competition, and mutual distinction between charity to the poor, sacerdotal donations to religious elites and institutions, and solidary mutual help between members of the same religious communities.” While Caner’s essay explores this nexus for Christians, Galit Hasan-Rokem shows that a series of late-antique rabbinic tales transforms the gift of sacrifice to sacerdotal gifts, thus

helping to create a new rabbinic communal identity based on the study and interpretation of Scripture.

The essays in this volume, of course, can certainly be read profitably individually or in traditional disciplinary clusters (e.g., Coffee, Konstan, and Stroup on the Roman world; Gardner and Hasan-Rokem on rabbinic culture in late antiquity; Crook, Wagner-Hasel, and Domingo Gygax on the Greek world). By organizing the volume according to the dimensions above, however, we are attempting to facilitate more cross-cultural and disciplinary comparisons that foreground central analytical issues. The goal of such comparisons is not, following Mauss, to develop a “grammar” of gift-giving in the Mediterranean region throughout antiquity but to illustrate the heuristic usefulness of Mauss’s concept of the gift for illuminating aspects of the ancient world.

Obviously a consideration of the gift in antiquity is a vast topic. We attempted to limit the geographical and temporal range somewhat by focusing on the Mediterranean region from the first millennium BCE to the seventh century CE. We thus strove for broad representation while recognizing that this collection is far from comprehensive.

* * *

After his strange invocation of King Arthur’s Round Table, Mauss ends his slim volume with a paragraph that points toward what he sees as the relevance of his study of “archaic societies” to modernity:

One can also see how this concrete study can lead not only to a science of customs, to a partial social science but even to moral conclusions, or rather, to adopt once more the old word, “civility,” or “civics,” as it is called nowadays. Studies of this kind indeed allow us to perceive, measure, and weigh up the various aesthetic, moral, religious, and economic motivations, the diverse material and demographic factors, the sum total of which are the basis of society and constitute our common life. (Mauss 1990: 83)

Mauss here, as earlier in his discussion of the transformation of the ancient economy to one based on commerce, money, and law, himself idealizes the archaic societies he examines. The writers in this volume show that Mauss underestimates the roles that hierarchy, symmetry, social context, and gender play in gift-giving. Mauss’s archaic societies are egalitarian in a way that no ancient society was – undoubtedly including the ones he read about and was purportedly describing. Political sympathies here appear to have played a role in Mauss’s analysis.

Mauss’s notion of the gift, as this volume and others have shown, has undeniable shortcomings. Yet, at the same time, the disparate essays collected here also show its remarkably enduring value. The gift, and a gift economy, is not a panacea to our modern social ills. But the gift – as object, discourse, and analytical concept – retains its power to generate new questions and research.

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Ceremonial Gift-Giving: The Lessons of Anthropology from Mauss and Beyond

MARCEL HÉNAFF

A famous scene from the *Iliad* testifies to an exemplary ceremonial exchange. As Diomedes and Glaucos prepare to fight each other in single combat, the former asks the latter: “Who among mortal men are you, good friend?” (*Il.* 6.123, trans. Lattimore 1951: 156) Glaucos replies by describing the heroic deeds of his grandfather Bellerophon:

He spoke, and Diomedes of the great war cry was gladdened.... “See now, you are my guest friend from far in the time of our fathers. Brilliant Oineus once was host to Bellerophon the blameless, in his halls, and twenty days he detained him, and these two gave to each other fine gifts in token of friendship.... Therefore I am your friend and host in the heart of Argos; you are mine in Lykia, when I come to your country. Let us avoid each other’s spears, even in the close fighting.... But let us exchange our armour, so that these others may know how we claim to be guests and friends from the days of our fathers.” (*Il.* 6.212–231, trans. Lattimore 1951: 158–159)

Finley comments on this dialogue as follows:

Guest-friendship was a very serious institution, the alternative to marriage in forging bonds between rulers; and there could have been no more dramatic test of its value in holding the network of relationships together than just such a critical moment. Guest-friend and guest-friendship were far more than sentimental terms of human affection. In the world of Odysseus they were technical names for very concrete relationships, as formal and evocative of rights and duties as marriage. (Finley 1956: 104–5)

Finley is right to note that this relationship was not primarily an emotional one; it involved a constraining ceremonial system. It illustrates perfectly the demonstration by Marcel Mauss in *The Gift*, as we will see. We should note from the outset that in the story of Diomedes and Glaucos that we have just presented, the gift relationship is reciprocal. This reciprocity appears self-evident to the protagonists, and readers immediately understand its legitimacy. Countless similar examples could be provided. We are thus confronted with a major problem that still pervades every debate on the question of gift-giving. Giving is unanimously and normatively defined as a generous gesture without expectation of reciprocation. As a consequence, forms of obligatory reciprocity are considered outdated and based on an archaic morality. To the present writer, such an interpretation appears entirely irrelevant. Our first priority must be to define the concept of giving and clarify its different uses. This will bring us to a more precise understanding of the highly specific character of ceremonial giving and to a discussion of the question of its transposition in contemporary societies.

Traditional Gift-giving: Mauss's Lesson

What we owe above all to Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (Mauss 1990, orig. 1923–1924), is the way it set up the *problem* of the ceremonial gift as a sociological issue. Mauss did so based on the ethnographic materials that were available at the beginning of the twentieth century, and by relating them to testimonies found in ancient Indian, Roman, Scandinavian, and Germanic literatures. He was not the first to show an interest in this phenomenon, but he was the first to systematically gather the relevant but scattered data and bring to the fore a model according to which the gift appears as a major social fact. He even called it “a total social fact” (I will return to this point). In short, Mauss epistemologically constructed a new problem.

The elaboration of his own synthesis owes much to Bronislaw Malinowski's 1922 book *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1961), on the great cycles of gift-exchange – so called *kula* – of the Trobriand Islands, a Melanesian archipelago. This gift-exchange activity constitutes the very core of indigenous social life: weeks or even months are dedicated to preparing boats and collecting precious goods – *waigu'a* – which numerous magical ceremonies aim to protect. The most important goods are the *bracelets* that move from east to west and the *necklaces* that move in the opposite direction. When the boats reach an island, those initiating the *kula* leave semiprecious objects on the beach as *opening gifts* meant to entice *kula* partners. Those who accept these *clinging gifts* are bound to continue the cycle; the main exchange, that of bracelets and necklaces, then starts, and extends over several days. When these ceremonies are over, the boats leave with the new gifts in order to enter into another exchange on the next island. Thus, a *network of privileged bonds* is woven over the whole of the archipelago through the exchange of these precious goods; some of those goods are known and reputed to be particularly

beautiful, and are given proper names. Their value, however, is due not only to the fact that they are made of rare stones or shells but above all to the fact that they belonged to such-and-such a person; it is due to the memory of the bonds that they carry with them. They constitute a source of *prestige* for those who keep them, but also for those who have been able to give them.

The originality of Mauss's analysis lay in his showing that these ritual gift practices implied *three inseparable obligations*: to give, to accept the gift, and to reciprocate it. At this point, and without engaging in a precise discussion of the analyses that were presented by Mauss or by the authors he discussed, a few remarks can be made.

First, there is the concept of "total social fact," that is, of a phenomenon that implicates *all* aspects of social life (religion, kinship, politics, morals, economics); this means that all those aspects are embedded within this social fact, which is the sphere of all spheres; in short, it is the dominant and unifying fact of the group's life. We should note that Mauss never applied this concept to other social facts.

Second, Mauss emphasized the *obligatory* character of the triad – giving, receiving, and reciprocating. He gave multiple examples of this, and he noted that the alternative is between exchanges of gifts – peace – and exchanges of blows – war; but he did not provide any real reason for this.

Third, even though he sometimes used inappropriate terms, such as "noble trade," or "contract," Mauss took care to make it clear that this exchange is profoundly different from exchanges in the marketplace. He noted, after Malinowski, that *kula* partners also practice profitable exchanges called *gimwali*, that is, barter in various consumer goods, but that they always do so *with different partners*. The goods involved in the ceremonial exchange are distinct from the consumer goods (which is also the case of ceremonial currencies). This is a crucial distinction. It means that ritual gift-giving is not the forerunner of commercial exchange; both take place at the same time and with different aims and ends.

Fourth, Mauss emphasized the fact that what is given through the thing given is always *oneself*: the Self of each partner, and through them that of the group. Is this an archaic magical feature? Or is it on the contrary a central aspect of the ceremonial gift that must be understood as a commitment of a different type than strictly contractual ones? We will return to this point.

Fifth, Mauss called this form of exchange of goods *archaic*; this implied that it has now disappeared or exists only under a residual form within our modernity. We will have to see if this is true. As a total social fact, how could it disappear?

Sixth and finally, Mauss's concluding remarks have remained famous in that he proposed to consider this type of generous and glorious exchange as a kind of countermodel to the purely self-interested and selfish exchanges involved in a capitalistic economy. Is there actually an economic lesson to be drawn from the practices of this ceremonial gift-giving?

My purpose in reexamining this issue from new perspectives and by raising new questions is to show – or at least to point out in this very short presentation – that the gift-giving Mauss discussed implies a conception of reciprocity that not only

has nothing to do with the notion of self-interest but also defines the very core of human relationships. Mauss himself did not clearly establish this because he still interpreted gift-giving practices in terms of goods (even when these goods are generously offered), whereas they must be interpreted in terms of symbols of a commitment between partners. But what is the aim of this commitment? It seems to me that answering this question requires going beyond Mauss. Here is my point: *I propose to show that this gift-giving relationship constitutes the fundamental gesture or procedure of public recognition between human groups and that it is what establishes them as uniquely human and capable of forming alliances and conventions, thus constituting the very genesis of the political relationship, and this will enable us to understand the contemporary situation.*

Clarifying the Concept: The Three Categories of Gift-Giving

When we reflect on what it means to give, we believe we can agree on a broad definition that applies to every case and could be stated as follows: "Giving is providing a good or service in a non-self-interested manner." This means that no reciprocity is guaranteed or expected. This definition seems perfectly reasonable, yet applying it to every form of gift-giving can lead to the most serious confusions, since ritual gift-giving precisely includes the strict obligation to reciprocate the gift. We must therefore acknowledge that the character of oblation that is at the core of this definition is not relevant in this case. The solution that has generally been chosen to confront this problem has been to dismiss ritual gift-giving from the scope of this definition, calling it "archaic" and suspecting that the requirement of reciprocity involves the expectation of an advantage (or interest) that would be the damning evidence for this archaic character. Doing so already draws a distinction between "true" gift-giving (which is supposed to have a character of oblation and be unconditional) and its impure instantiations that can be identified by their difference from the definition. In contrast to this approach, one could resort to casuistic considerations on the amphibology of the word "interest" in order to associate it in a paradoxical way with the word "gift" so as to preserve this "old-fashioned" notion of gift-giving. In my opinion, considering that several models of gift-giving exist and that they are significantly different from one another is a more promising approach than claiming to force a single mold onto overly diverse practices.

An effort at clarification is required. Let us start with a few convincing examples. It is hard to see how the following could be placed under the same label: (1) the festivals and gifts that chiefs offer one another in turn in traditional societies; (2) the celebrations and presents that parents give to their children on the occasion of their birthdays or that anyone offers to loved ones for their enjoyment; (3) the donations given to populations on the occasion of catastrophes. These three examples are significant: it can be considered that they exemplify three main types of

gift-giving: (a) the first is generally called “archaic,” a concept heavily loaded with debatable presuppositions; I prefer to keep to descriptive criteria and call it *ceremonial* gift-giving; it is always described as *public* and *reciprocal*; (b) the second can be said to be *gracious* or *oblatory*; it may or may not be private, but it is primarily *unilateral*; (c) the third can be called *mutual aid* pertaining to either social *solidarity* or so-called philanthropic activity; it is viewed by some as constituting the modern form of traditional gift-giving.

When a concept – such as gift-giving – applies to such different practices and is open to such divergent argumentations, there is reason to believe that its definition is imprecise or even confused and that the practices involved have not been sufficiently described and categorized. Thus it is likely that the three examples given above do not constitute a homogeneous class of objects.

The first type is characterized by the obligation to reciprocate the gift that has been received, as shown by ethnographic investigations; it therefore raises the issue of reciprocity (which is certainly much more than a mere exchange of good manners). Its lexical field is that of *dosis/antidosis* in Greek, in which *anti* always indicates the *action in return* that is called for by the initial action.

The second type reveals a spontaneous generosity toward those close to the giver, which is viewed above all as a psychological or moral quality. Its lexical field is that of *charis* in Greek (one of the primary meanings of which is “joy”), that of unilateral giving (there is no such thing as “anti-*charis*”); this recalls the whole of the theoretical field of biblical grace (*hēn*, i.e., “favor,” translated as *charis* in the Septuagint, and a term used also by Paul), as well as the Latin term *gratia* from Seneca to Augustine, and medieval through Reformation theologies.

The third type, as opposed to the second, expresses a much more social dimension of generosity toward either close associates (friends or neighbors, between which reciprocity is desirable but not mandatory) or strangers (a case in which returning a gift would not make sense): this would be the field of the *philia* or *philanthropia* discussed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*. It also encompasses various practices of solidarity among close associates or members of a chosen community (such as a religious congregation or a group of friends) and everything Weber (1946: 348; see also Weber 1981) described as pertaining to “the religious ethic of brotherhood” (*die religiöse Ethik der Brüderlichkeit*).

At this point a crucial question must be dealt with: whereas forms of gift-giving pertaining to cases (2) and (3) are still common practice to this day, it is clear that ceremonial gift-giving as a public form of exchange of presents between groups no longer constitutes a predominant fact in modern societies and that nowadays it is certainly not a “total social fact.” From this point of view, gift-giving is a phenomenon of the past that barely survives in the form of official gifts. This seems to legitimize the use of the term “archaic” and to explain the temptation to identify traces of this in the two other forms of gift-giving that still occur.

It is clear that ceremonial gift-giving raises a set of questions that are specific to it and that radically distinguish it from the two other forms of gift-giving. Since it is impossible to discuss within the limited framework of this presentation the now

considerable empirical collection of material that has been gathered for almost a century, I will just present a critical assessment indicating eight variables that can be drawn from field investigations and that make it possible to better identify the specificity of ceremonial gift-giving: (1) *goods exchanged*: precious objects (or beings); festive foods; (2) *procedures*: well-established rituals accepted by the partners; (3) *level of communication*: public; (4) *effects caused or expected*: (a) strong bonds between givers and receivers; (b) prestige and rank gained; (5) *type of choice*: mandatory; (6) *mode of relationship*: reciprocal; (7) *attitude of exchange*: generous rivalry; (8) *type of involvement*: personal.

Let us note that the two other types of gift-giving (type II, which I call “gracious,” and type III, which I call “solidarity-based”), share only one or two of these variables with ceremonial gift-giving. It is therefore clear that discussing “gift-giving” in general entails a serious epistemological risk. It is not possible to discuss gift-giving without adding the adjective that specifies the realm in which it is practiced. It is clear that this forces us to divide what has been called “the gift paradigm” into three parts or, better, to acknowledge that there are at least three paradigms rather than a single one. They can be described as different *realms* or orders in Pascal’s sense: each of them has its own system of justification. Thus reciprocity, which is essential to ceremonial gift-giving, is not relevant to gracious gift-giving but may or may not be valued in solidarity-based gift-giving. Similarly, discretion – self-effacement of the giver – which is often expected (and sometimes indispensable) in gracious gift-giving would make no sense in ceremonial gift-giving, which is public by definition.

Ceremonial Gift-Exchange Is Neither Economic Nor Moral or Legal

What is at stake in the facts discussed by Mauss is the reinforcement of the bond between the partners, the public prestige granted and gained, and the alliance established. If we extend his conclusions, we can say that ritual giving is as alien to profitable exchanges and contractual relationships as it is to charitable giving.

With respect to profitable exchanges, let us note that many observers have proposed an economic interpretation of gift exchange as barter or trade. F. Boas (1969) considers potlatch as an archaic form of lending with interest. Such interpretations are found even in the work of theorists as scrupulous and well informed as Max Weber and Karl Polanyi. Malinowski, however, does not make this mistake: he emphasizes the difference between *kula* and *gimwali* (also noticed by Mauss). *Kula* exchanges do presuppose the existence of an economy: Trobriand Islanders cannot live on gifts alone any more than we do. They produce food and artifacts, and they must craft the precious objects they exchange. Like everyone else, they exchange ordinary goods for everyday uses. The term *gift economy* can thus be entirely misleading if we fail to understand that ordinary economic activity is subordinate to the central social fact, in which the life of the group is expressed and

transfigured. The nature of *kula* exchange is not economic. Its essential function is to bond different groups through the network of the partners in the exchange. The purpose of celebrations is not for the partners to offer and gain consumer goods, but to give one another tokens and public evidence of their intention to live together.

This does not entail that the nature of these ritual exchanges is moral. Their purpose is not to demonstrate goodness or even solidarity. They do not amount to mutual support. Ceremonial goods are not intended to help needy recipients survive. They are precious goods valued as symbols of alliance, as tokens of the commitment of the giver. The alliance established or renewed involves the public life of the group (as does exogamic alliance, this most exemplary of exchanges). As such, it belongs to the political sphere. It is not foremost a gesture of support. This exchange institutes an agreement and sanctions trust. It may also express an attitude of compassion and solidarity in trials. To the extent that these exchanges involve morality, it is in terms of the loyalty displayed and the honor at stake in the alliance, not because of any generous intention. Unlike these collective practices, charitable actions are admirable to the extent that they are discrete. In the same way that philanthropy entails no compensation, charitable action entails no reply. The gesture of ceremonial giving, on the contrary, must be *public* and seen by all: it commits the entire group and determines the prestige of the giver. Because its aim is alliance, it implies a reply: reciprocation is expected. Alliance is necessarily reciprocal. The commitment of one partner entails the commitment of the other. We must therefore ask: Are there several, fundamentally different, types of giving?

Finally, ceremonial gift-exchange is not a legal-type exchange in the sense of a contractual relationship. In *La Foi jurée* (1922), Georges Davy, a disciple of Mauss, viewed potlatch as an archaic form of contract. Mauss disagreed. Although in *The Gift* he used the term contract, he did so in the broader sense of pact. In the strict sense, a contractual obligation has a specific duration. It sets an accounting requirement with respect to the amount and character of the objects exchanged, and it involves a constraining legal commitment whose breach is subject to sanctions such as fines or prison terms. The aim of a contract is the strict equality of and mutual benefit to the partners. A contract formally bonds them as agents under the law, not as subjects committed in their very being. Gift-exchange, on the contrary, is viewed as obligatory only in the sense that it involves prestige, honor, and the person of the giver, beyond any equalitarian calculus. Gift and contract are antithetical concepts.

Ceremonial Gift-Giving as a Pact of Recognition

I must, then, present an entirely different interpretation of ceremonial gift-giving, breaking even with Mauss. I have already mentioned above the central argument of my hypothesis: *ceremonial gift-giving is primarily a procedure of public and reciprocal recognition among groups within traditional societies*. It still remains to

determine what this *recognition* means and why it occurs through such a procedure. A central lesson is provided by investigations concerning *first encounters*. Numerous testimonies have taught us that these encounters primarily take the form of reciprocal exchanges of presents: the *opening gifts*. This may seem sensible and courteous to us. Our surprise arises once these exchanges are presented as *mandatory* – the alternative being conflict – whereas nowadays polite phrases and friendly attitudes are sufficient. The whole question lies in these two previous observations. Nothing can help us understand what is at stake better than a short narrative reported by a British anthropologist (A. Strathern 1971: xii) who had heard it in the 1970s from his New Guinean informant. During the 1920s, the latter had witnessed the arrival of the first white man in his village. It so happens that, according to local legends, the dead could return as light-skinned cannibalistic ghosts. It was decided that a test would be performed to determine whether or not this potentially dangerous stranger was a human being. The white man (who was a well-informed Australian administrator) was offered some pigs. The informant concluded: “He gave us shell valuables in return for pigs, and we decided that he was a human like us.”

It seems to me that this story can be viewed as an exemplary parable that can help us understand the most general meaning of reciprocal, public, and ceremonial gift-giving as well as its essential relationship with the phenomenon of *recognition* (Hénaff 2010: 107–155). The opening gifts ritual is a *procedure of reciprocal recognition* in the triple sense of *identifying*, *accepting*, and finally *honoring* others. At this point a first question must be raised: why does this recognition have to occur through exchanged *goods*? Other questions arise: what is it that is recognized in the other? What does this recognition make possible?

In order to answer these questions – and to increase our surprise – it seemed to me that we had to move to an entirely different field and to wonder whether or not other animal societies, starting with those closest to us (apes), exhibit behaviors comparable to these. What the most advanced research on this issue shows us – especially those regarding chimpanzees – is that (1) mutual recognition as *identification* occurs through vocal messages, smells, and above all coordinated sets of gestures and attitudes; (2) recognition as *acceptance* takes place through postures and procedures of reciprocity (such as attitudes of appeasement, mutual grooming, sharing of space), but never through *objects given as tokens and kept in exchange for others that are given either immediately or later* (which has nothing to do with the sharing of food among various mammals or with the mating rituals of certain birds, reptiles, and insects). Adam Smith stated this quite well: “Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog” (1993: 21). It seems that humans alone resort to the procedure that consists of committing oneself by giving something of oneself as a *token of and substitute for oneself*. The fact that an agent *vouches for himself* in front of other agents *for the duration of a time period* can be provisionally considered as defining him as a Self. It is remarkable that this occurs through the mediation of a *thing*, a third element that constitutes a *token* of the giver. This recalls the classical Greek and

Roman procedure of the *pact* performed through a *sym-bolon* (derived from *ballein*, “to put” and *syn*, “together”), a piece of pottery broken in two, of which each partner would keep one half that could fit the other as witness *for the future* that an agreement had been made. According to this model (it is no more than a model, since the *symbolon* rite is not in and of itself an exchange of gifts) reciprocal gift-giving is nothing else than the originating gesture of *reciprocal recognition* between humans, a gesture that is found in no other living beings to the extent that it is mediated by a *thing*, but a thing that comes from oneself, stands for oneself, and bears witness to the commitment that was made. To form an alliance – a pact – means bringing together one’s own self and the otherness of the other person through a thing that comes from oneself and is desirable to the other. This third party brings the two sides together: there is no alliance without an Ark of the Covenant. The thing given binds the two parties primarily by bearing witness that the bond has been accepted. This reciprocal recognition through the exchange of something that specifically belongs to the group (or its representative) and is offered to the other is at the core of the exogamic relationship and illuminates the prohibition of incest. It is above all a positive imperative of reciprocity: one is a human being to the extent that one moves outside of the “natural” group based on consanguinity by recognizing and forming an alliance with the *other*. In order to be oneself, one must recognize what one is not.

This is in short the new anthropological interpretation of ceremonial gift-giving that I am proposing; obviously, it does not apply to the two other models of gift-giving, namely, unilateral gracious gift-giving and gift-giving out of solidarity. Before we can move forward, we must understand how the concepts of symbol, convention, and alliance are interconnected and how the concepts of reciprocity and obligation are related to them.

To say that there is an *alliance* – and in particular an exogamic alliance – means that there is a *pact* and therefore an *intentional* recognition between “us” and “you” beyond a mere social self-regulation among groups. To say that this alliance brings together what is not together – performs a *sym-ballein* – and belongs to the realm of intentionality means that the encounter between two autonomous beings involves a decision to give oneself rules: establishing a convention amounts to engaging in these rules (which is one of the primary purposes of rituals) and committing oneself: giving oneself in the thing that guarantees the pact. What has been concluded through the *opening gifts* is extended through time by relationships that rituals aim at stabilizing; but above all this is accomplished through exogamic alliance, which indexes the agreement between groups on the reproduction of life itself and connects it to the succession of generations. From the moment when the exchange of gifts as a gesture of alliance takes place, this exchange gives rise to human groups that are regulated by a *convention*.

What is the meaning of the *obligation* to reply in ceremonial gift-giving? It is neither a physical necessity to react (as in the case of living organisms responding to external stimuli) nor a truly legal obligation (which would provide for sanctions, as is the case when contracts are not abided by) or a moral requirement (in the sense

that it would be immoral not to reply). What we are dealing with is the *structure of a game* and an *alternation principle* analogous to that found in any game between partners and even more precisely in a duel. Entering the game entails having to reply. Failing to reply amounts to taking oneself out of the game. The obligation to respond lies in this. One does not throw the ball back in order to be generous or courteous or out of a contractual obligation but because the response is part of the game, or rather of the system of accepted rules. The inseparable character of the three terms of the triad concerns not only the relationship between the partners but also their reciprocal action. The interplay of gift and counter-gift is a gesture of reply that precisely matches the alternation of blows (in fact, the same partners involved in the exchange of gifts are also responsible for vindictory justice in case an offense was committed). This involves neither moral choice, nor altruism, nor charity, but only the requirement to *reply* that is specific to action among the living.

The relationship is agonistic from the start. But there is more to this: the “game” is at the same time the pact that is offered and accepted through the goods exchanged. It can therefore be said that reciprocal ceremonial gift-giving confronts and resolves in a particularly elegant way the prisoner’s dilemma (decision-making based on limited information or involving uncertainty regarding others). One bets on trust and obtains it through a reply guaranteed by the things given. I propose to call this fundamental relationship of recognition *political*. Why? Because it is radically different from the *social bond* that exists in every animal society. The alliance as an explicit gesture of acceptance through the choice of a token-symbol is only observed in human reciprocal ceremonial gift-giving; from the outset it amounts to a public recognition of the other group and a commitment to coexist and collaborate, in short to a *convention*; this is precisely what Aristotle called a *politeia*. The alliance takes up and encompasses the social bond, but it also transcends it by changing it into a political bond, which is to say an intentional relationship of association. This is the relationship that is unique to the human animal; he/she is the *zōon politikon*, in that through the procedure of *recognition* he/she institutes life under rules. The uniquely human bond is political in that it is the unique bond between autonomous beings capable of assigning themselves a law (although not necessarily in an explicit manner). It is therefore clear that an essential articulation exists between human order as reciprocal *public recognition* and specifically political instituted order; as an institutional procedure between groups, ceremonial gift-giving among participants in an alliance constitutes the very emergence of a *public order* – though not necessarily its permanent historical form. This is what remains to be explained (briefly, at least).

Conclusion

A first question immediately arises: how is this *public* reciprocal recognition, which is performed through ritual exchanges of gifts in traditional societies, expressed in societies with a central state system? The only possible answer seems to me that *this*

recognition is affirmed and guaranteed by law and by the totality of the political and legal institutions. The true heritage of ceremonial gift-giving will thus be found not in the realm of the distribution or exchange of goods but in the realm of rights and of the struggles concerning them. It is for historical anthropology to show how this transformation occurred. This cannot be demonstrated in detail in this essay. We must recall, however, that the ceremonial exchanges discussed above concern societies in which the forms of political authority are generally identified with the statuses defined by *kinship systems*. For this very reason, public relationships between groups primarily occur through matrimonial alliances. But from the moment when an evolution develops that leads to the emergence of a power entity that transcends kinship groups, something changes radically (this shift and the crisis that comes with it are expressed by Greek tragedy, in particular Aeschylus's *Oresteia*). Individuals now appear as members of a larger group – such as the city-state or what we now call the State – while, for a long time to come, they also remain members of lineages or clans. But the new identity takes precedence over the old (generating a crisis that is in evidence in Sophocles' *Antigone*). What is new is the equal status – *isonomia* – shared by everyone under the law – *nomos*. It pertains to the middle space – *meson* – where allegiances between chiefs are cancelled in favor of a public recognition that is identically granted to all. Thus in the *Iliad*, when Achilles, furious at having been despoiled of his share of booty, succeeds in having Agamemnon return it to him, he refuses to have it handed to him directly by the Achaean king. He demands that the goods be placed in the middle – *es to meson* – so that they will come from the whole community of the Greeks, the *polis*.

Along with the emergence of the city and from this empty center, the law – *nomos* – as arbiter was proclaimed, and the heroic reciprocity of lineages confronting each other in the *agōn* came to lose its legitimacy. Arbitrational justice was substituted for the vindictory justice that characterized ceremonial gift-giving relationships. A different history was beginning. From then on every democratic transformation would take place under the sign of the law and the third party as arbiter, and against all forms of reciprocal allegiance (such as feudal relationships). This started with the first city-states and it still defines our political modernity.

Translated from French by Jean-Louis Morhange

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Further Reading

To better understand the approach I have proposed in this essay, I would like to refer readers to some books mentioned in the References and, in particular, to some of my other writings: Hénaff 2003, 2009, 2010, 2011. For more information on the Maussian approach,

I refer readers to Godbout and Caillé 1998, which takes up the main points of Mauss's *The Gift* and presents developments regarding practices of solidarity; I also refer to the classical interpretation of Lévi-Strauss 1987, which presents exogamy as a system of reciprocal gift-giving relationships. Regarding historical anthropology, I would mention the following: Benveniste 1973; Gernet 1981; Scheid-Tissinier 1994. In the field of ethnography itself, the following books are important: Sahlins 1972; Rubel and Rosman 1978; M. Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992; and Godelier 1999. For a reflection on the relationships between gift and economy, I refer the reader to Gregory 1982 and Polanyi 1963; and on the question of recognition, the seminal book is Honneth 1995.

Alms, Blessings, Offerings: The Repertoire of Christian Gifts in Early Byzantium

DANIEL F. CANER

Traditionally seen as a transitional era between the ancient and medieval worlds, late antiquity (circa 150–650 CE) has frequently also been viewed as a watershed in the Western history of “the gift.” It is commonly held that through almsgiving, monotheistic religions introduced an altruistic ideal of gift-giving that had been largely absent from the civic societies of the ancient Mediterranean. According to Marcel Mauss, “we can even date from the Mishnaic era, from the victory of the ‘Poor’ in Jerusalem [c.70–200 CE, the early rabbinic period after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple], the time when the doctrine of charity and alms was born, which, with Christianity and Islam, spread around the world” (Mauss 1990: 18; cf. Veyne 1990: 28–33). By identifying almsgiving as a righteous sacrifice to God, monotheism made possible a form of gift-giving motivated by religious intention rather than expectation of worldly return. But scholars familiar with late antiquity and its traditions have been skeptical that any such fundamental change occurred. In particular, historians of the late Roman Empire have argued that Christian preachers, by stressing the redemptive aspect of almsgiving over other possibilities, effectively reduced it to a means of pursuing self-interest (Neil 2010). The implication is not only that old models of *do et des*, self-interested giving reemerged to eclipse newer ones, but that no alternative, disinterested religious model was ever forcefully asserted.

It is my position that an alternative Christian model of disinterested religious gift-giving was, in fact, forcefully asserted in the late-antique period. This model, however, was based not on “alms” but on a now less familiar type of gift called a “blessing” (*eulogia*, *benedictio*, *burktha*, or *smou* in Greek, Latin, Syriac, or Coptic).

Though attested five times in the Septuagint and occasionally in Christian literature of both the earlier period and the late-antique West, this special type of Christian gift only becomes prominent in church and monastic literature of the late Roman East (“early Byzantium”), especially in the Greek, Syriac, and Coptic sources written circa 450–650 CE. Elsewhere I have made strong claims about the practical and theoretical significance of the blessing, proposing that it actually represents the first example of a “pure,” disinterested gift explicitly idealized as such in either Christian or Western history (Caner 2006, 2008). My purpose here is to explore how such blessings were thought to differ from other types of Christian gifts in early Byzantium, in particular from “alms” and “offerings.” Indeed, the very existence of the blessing forces us to define more precisely what was meant by those more familiar terms. To that end I have surveyed depictions of blessings, alms, and offerings (as well as of another type of gift, called a “fruitbearing”) in Greek hagiography dating circa 350–650 CE. Besides establishing an empirical basis for future work, this survey not only demonstrates the primacy of gifts called blessings in hagiographical discourse of the period, but, perhaps more importantly, reveals the existence of a complex repertoire of Christian gifts in early Byzantium. Capable of addressing a broad range of different religious needs, donors, recipients and concerns, this highly complex, flexible repertoire reflected the complexities of early Byzantine Christianity itself.

Origin and Ideals of the Christian “Blessing”

Before turning to that survey, I must first explain its pivotal Greek term, *eulogia*. This is a term already well known to liturgical scholars, archaeologists, and curators. When applied to material items, it has in the past been understood to refer almost exclusively to either one of two items: either to communion bread that church communities exchanged as tokens of fellowship in both pre-Constantinian and late Roman eras (Dix 1945: 82–100; Galavaris 1970: 109–11; Taft 1999), or to healing talismans taken from early Byzantine holy people or shrines. The latter have especially received attention owing to the survival of related ampullae now on display in many European and American museums. Often inscribed with the word *EULOGIA*, such flasks once contained a residue of dirt, dust, and oil scraped off a holy person’s body or sanctuary floor (Kötting 1950: 403–13; Vikan 1984: 68–72; Maraval 1985: 237–41; Hahn 1990). Since hagiography shows that such bread and talismans were both prized for their miraculous powers, it has usually been held that both were called *eulogiai* owing to the divine blessing they carried by virtue of their original connection to or contact with some saint, sacrament, relic, or shrine.

Such items, however, represent only examples that are best known today of what was meant by a *eulogia* in early Byzantium or Christian antiquity. To judge from the literary references, much more common were examples like the following: rations of bread *eulogiai* that church leaders dispensed to their clerics, or abbots to their

monks; the coin or cash *eulogiai* that lay admirers presented to churches and monasteries, as well as to individual clerics and monks; and the bread, fruit, or other edible *eulogiai* that clerics or monks provided as hospitality to their guests (Drews 1898; Gorce 1925: 184–85; Stuiber 1966). Indeed, according to my survey, the latter is actually the most commonly found example in Greek hagiography, attested far more often than the talismanic type of *eulogia* described above (see Table 3.2). Moreover, though all such blessings are sometimes presented as having miraculous powers, most often they are not. In fact, the only characteristic they all share is that they are all depicted as gifts that are given to, or received by, some Christian holy person or institution. What accounts for this early Byzantine usage?

The answer lies fundamentally in 2 Corinthians 9:5–12. This is the most elaborate of several passages in which Paul discusses the donations he sought to collect to support the Christian community in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1–10; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15; Romans 15:25–27). Here he repeatedly uses the word *eulogia* and other key terms to clarify exactly what he was seeking and differentiate it from other possibilities:

⁵I thought it necessary ... to arrange in advance this blessing [*eulogia*] that you promised, so that it might be given as a blessing [*eulogia*] and not as an extortion [*pleonexia*]. ⁶The point is this: whoever sows a little will also reap a little, but whoever sows in blessings [*ep' eulogiais*] will reap in blessings [*ep' eulogiais*]. ⁷So let each give as his heart has decided to give, not out of grief or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸Indeed, God has power to make every grace abound [*charin perisseusai*] for you, so that by always having enough in everything in every way, you may have something extra [*perisseuete*] for every good work. ⁹As it is written, “He scatters abroad, He gives to the poor, His righteousness endures forever” [Psalm 112:9]. ¹⁰For whoever supplies seeds to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and make the harvest of your righteousness increase. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for every generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the ministration of this service not only relieves the wants of the holy ones, but also makes abundance [*perisseuoussa*] through many thanksgivings to God.¹

Whatever associations the word *eulogia* might have had with material gifts in Paul's own milieu (Stuiber 1966: 905–6; Downs 2008: 140–45), its use in this passage is crucial for understanding its appearance and development as a special type of Christian gift in early Byzantium. In the first place, Paul's passage provided a distinct term (in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic texts, as well as the Greek examined here) to denote charitable gifts that might be used to support those most commonly esteemed “holy ones” in early Byzantium, namely, clerics and monks. But equally important, this passage outlined a kind of theory that explained the origin and nature of such gifts. According to Paul, blessings originated in the basic grants (*charis*, often translated “grace”) that God had given a Christian; thus, ultimately all blessings derived from God's own generosity. But more specifically, such gifts were to derive from whatever material resources God had given beyond what each Christian needed for his or her own sufficiency. Thus a material blessing was

something that derived from excess wealth or surplus, a point Paul emphasizes by repeatedly using the word *perisseuein* (meaning not only “to abound” but also “to be extra” or “leftover”) to describe both Christian giver and gift. The result was an imaginative yet practicable definition not only of material wealth (anything “left-over”), but also of what constituted the charitable gift that might derive from it. Because it came out of whatever God-given material was extra, superfluous, or merely leftover, a Christian blessing was something that could theoretically be given away easily and cheerfully, in a manner pleasing to God.

The innovative features of this definition must be stressed. On the one hand, by redefining material wealth in such a way as to encompass one’s valueless leftovers as well as one’s valuable resources, and on the other, by utilizing an agrarian imagery that recognized the power of seeds to produce a disproportionately high yield seemingly by themselves (9:10, “whoever supplies seeds to the sower ... will make the harvest of your righteousness increase”), Paul conjured a new model of charitable gift-giving that emphasized material abundance over self-sacrifice and scarcity. It thereby not only made charitable generosity seem easy for all but also made asymmetrical giving seem possible without need for replenishing one’s supplies through labor or reciprocity. The impact of this model in early Byzantine hagiography is illustrated most vividly by stories of bread supplies that miraculously multiply in storerooms of churches or monasteries willing to give such supplies away as “blessings” to strangers in need. It is also reflected in sixth-century advice that monks give any small “superfluity” – that is, leftover – as a blessing to whatever beggar came by their monastery (Caner 2008: 225–27, 236–37). To the degree to which such advice was actually followed (and we know it was fostered by church and monastic systems of supplemental rations: Caner 2006: 340–49), such practices, like the Pauline model itself, posed a radical alternative to the hard-learned habits of careful economizing or hoarding which, to judge from the sermons of Basil of Caesarea and other church fathers, were otherwise typically practiced in cities and countrysides of the day, especially in times of great need (Holman 2001: 103–4; Garnsey 1988: 76–80).

There was, however, another way in which Paul’s conception of a Christian blessing inspired an alternative mode of gift-giving in early Byzantium. This was the distinction he explicitly draws in 2 Corinthians 9:5 between gifts given “as blessings” and those given “as *pleonexia*.” This Greek term, usually translated as “extortion,” literally meant the impulse to demand more than one required, and by extension came to denote greed, arrogance, self-aggrandizement, or anything exacted to satisfy the wants and demands of those conditions. Paul glosses the latter as things given “out of grief or compulsion” (2 Corinthians 9:7). To appreciate what this feature of Paul’s passage would have meant to Christian writers, clerics, or monks in early Byzantium, we should recall the historian Ramsey MacMullen’s summation of the earlier Roman Empire as an “oily, present-giving world” (MacMullen 1988: 126). This could be said all the more of the late Roman Empire of the East. Third- and fourth-century restructuring had produced not only a hefty and more remote imperial court, but also an administrative and bureaucratic

superstructure unlike anything seen before. This resulted not only in new avenues of rank, patronage, and influence, but also in the routine use of gifts to secure advancement, obtain hearings, define status within the imperial court, or enforce relationships of dependency between patrons and clients. Such worldly gift-giving also seems to have resulted in a certain hardening of sensibilities towards gift-exchange, most evident in the case of so-called guest-gifts (*xenia*). Traditionally exchanged among aristocrats or given by clients to visiting patrons, the word in this period is often treated as just a synonym for “bribe,” or replaced altogether by the word *dasmos* (“tribute”). It was within this early Byzantine culture of worldly gift-giving that Paul’s distinction between gifts given as *eulogiai* and those given as *pleonexia* had special significance: a blessing was supposed to be a very different kind of gift, both in spirit and in practice. Evidence of concern for this ideal and for its preservation is reflected in episcopal letters that complain of its abuse (as when Severus of Antioch realized that gifts he had received as blessings had actually been sent to him as bribe, Severus Ant. *Epp.* 1.48), or in hagiographical depictions of saints giving blessings to guests without demanding any return. For example, when describing how a Roman empress received bread blessings as hospitality while visiting Saint Matrona, the author of the *Life of Matrona* repeatedly notes the empress’s surprise that the saint had not asked her for “anything in return at all” (*v. Matron. Perg.* 32).

Prompted by such descriptions and expressions of concern, I have argued that the blessing represents an early Byzantine example of a pure gift ideal, in the classic sense of a gift that imposed no obligation on its receiver to reciprocate or make a return. Already implied in Paul’s contrast between a gift given as a *eulogia* and one given as *pleonexia*, this pure gift ideal was bolstered by a conceit, first attested in sixth-century hagiography, that such blessings were not actually human gifts at all; rather, they were gifts from God, bestowed on deserving humans through the mere agency of human donors. This divine dimension is crucial for understanding how the Christian blessing came to represent a pure gift ideal (Caner 2006: 354–60). The fact that such gifts were imagined to come from God helps explain why they could be thought to differ intrinsically from all worldly gifts and be associated with an innate capacity to heal, revitalize, or enrich. But more to the point, the fact that such gifts were imagined to come from God rather than from a human donor meant that they were somewhat impersonal gifts that did not need reciprocation – either to a human donor (since the blessings in theory did not ultimately come from them) or to God (since to him no human could possibly make a comparable return).

Once conceived as something God-given and divine, the blessing also came to represent something that was, by definition, both disinterested and pure. These observations have led me to propose that the Christian blessing represents the first clear example of a pure, disinterested gift in Western history. For while there is evidence that some Greek and Roman philosophers recognized the possibility of a disinterested gift or benefit (most notably Seneca: Griffin 2003), there is little evidence that it was widely publicized or fostered by systematic

practice (as again is evidenced in early Byzantium by church and monastic provisioning of clerics and monks with supplemental, charitable rations: Caner 2006: 340–49); and though Jewish rabbis acknowledged God alone as Israel’s patron and sought to distance their communities from the Greco-Roman culture of reciprocity (e.g., Schwartz 2010), their teachings on charitable gift-giving emphasized the dignity of the receiver rather than concern for interestedness or disinterestedness (Silber 2000: 127). Significantly, in neither culture do we find any particular term being coined or consistently used to refer to a disinterested gift. Indeed, as Gregg Gardner has explained elsewhere in this volume, rabbis sought to address problems that might arise from gift-giving by reconceptualizing the charitable gift as not a gift at all, but a loan. What must be stressed is that, as a pure gift ideal, the Christian blessing was largely a historical product of early Byzantium. For though inspired by 2 Corinthians and known to early church communities, the Christian blessing gained its full definition and importance precisely in contrast to worldly gifts and gift-giving practices of the late Roman imperial East. More will be said about the historical circumstances involved below. First, I wish to explore more fully what was meant by a blessing by delineating its features against those of other religious gifts in early Byzantium. So far I have focused exclusively on differences between blessings and secular gifts: how did blessings differ from more familiar types of Christian gifts, such as “alms” and “offerings”?

To answer that question, I have utilized the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* search engine to scan twenty-eight Greek hagiographical texts written over a three-hundred-year period, starting with the *Life of Antony* near the middle of the fourth century and ending with the *Life of John the Almsgiver* near the middle of the seventh.² I have also scanned five by sight,³ making a total of thirty-three samples. Though not perfect or exhaustive,⁴ this survey provides a sufficiently broad and consistent basis for identifying ideals and trends related to religious gift-giving in early Byzantium. Besides counting references to blessings, alms (*eleēmosynē*), offerings (*prosphorai*), and fruitbearings (*karpophoriai*), I have paid close attention to who is being depicted as giving or receiving each type of gift, as well as to any stated rationale for giving or receiving them. In so doing, I follow Ilana Silber’s proposal that we pursue clarity in studying religious gift-giving by discerning between potentially distinct types of gifts: sacrificial gifts given to gods, sacerdotal gifts given to religious leaders or their institutions, and charitable gifts given to the poor or needy (Silber 2000: 122–24; 2003: 299–301). I focus on hagiography – that is, narratives written to describe or prescribe Christian holiness – not only to obtain the broadest range of samples within a single genre but also to isolate the ideals and concerns related to Christian religious professionals themselves, as hagiography arguably reflects more than any other genre. Following hagiographical conventions, I classify all such religious professionals, whether clerics, monks, or saints, as “holy people,” thereby differentiating them from the more ordinary Christian *kosmikai*, or “lay people.” Both, of course, must be distinguished from “God.”

A Survey of Christian Gifts in Early Byzantine Greek Hagiography

The survey of these hagiographical texts may be summarized as follows. Out of 197 total references to blessings, alms, offerings, and fruitbearings, more are made to blessings than to all the other types of Christian gifts combined. Specifically, blessings are mentioned over twice as often as offerings, and nearly three times as often as alms. This confirms that blessings, not alms, were the dominant type of Christian gift in Greek hagiographical discourse of the period. Chronology clearly also makes a difference: the preponderance of alms references are found in early (fourth- and fifth-century) hagiographies, while the vast majority of blessings references (80 percent) come from late (sixth- and seventh-century) hagiographies, where they are mentioned six times as often as alms. Regional provenance also seems important: nearly half the references to blessings come from only a third of the texts, all of which originate in sixth- or seventh-century Palestine or Cyprus.

Turning from frequency to givers, recipients, and rationales for each gift type, here too the survey yields sharp distinctions. To start with blessings: while these are depicted as being given by lay people as well as by God (both first explicitly so in the sixth century),⁵ the vast majority are given by holy people. And while God and holy people give blessings to everybody (i.e., to holy people as well as to lay people, to rich or poor, to male or female, and so on), lay people only give them to holy people – lay people are never depicted as giving them to, or receiving them from, other lay people. Moreover, when lay people give blessings to holy people, these are always given in the form of gold coins or cash;⁶ blessings from holy people never come in this form, but are always presented as some victual or bodily object (e.g., bread, wine, fruit, a piece of clothing or hair). And while roughly half of those given by holy people to lay people are given as healing talismans, those given by holy people to other holy people are given only as hospitality or food rations (never as healing talismans). The only rationale explicitly cited for giving blessings is the need to be generous: thus one saint keeps a supply of blessings on hand in order to fulfill the command, “Give to all that ask of thee” (Matt 5:42), while others explain that receiving God’s blessings depends on being generous to all.⁷ Finally, God never receives blessings from anyone. When he gives them directly to lay people, he gives gold, water, or an abundant harvest,⁸ whereas to holy people he gives stocks of wine, bread, or water.⁹ In either case, God usually bestows his blessings in response to prayers from a local holy person, or simply in recognition of that person’s generosity or holiness.¹⁰ In one case a saint distributes as blessings to the poor items he received from lay people as offerings.¹¹

Alms present a different picture. While God, holy people, and lay people are all described as “merciful” (*eleēmōn*), only holy people and lay people (i.e., not God) are depicted as giving material items (*eleēmosynē*, i.e., “alms”) as such. Rationales for their doing so range from service to Christ or the Theotokos,¹² to

Table 3.1 Frequency of Citations in Thirty-three Greek Hagiographical Texts, circa 350–650 CE

	<i>εὐλογία/ blessing</i>	<i>ἐλεημοσύνη/ alms</i>	<i>προσφορά/ offering</i>	<i>καρποφορία/ fruitbearing</i>
<i>v. Anton.</i>	0	2	0	0
<i>v. Macr.</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>v. Gr. Thaum.</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>h. mon.</i>	4	1	2	2
<i>h. Laus.</i>	1	3	3	1
<i>h. rel.</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>v. Syncl.</i>	0	8	0	0
<i>v. Hyp.</i>	8	2	1	4
<i>v. Auxent.</i>	3	0	0	1
<i>v. Pach. gr.</i>	0	2	2	0
<i>v. Melan. Jn.</i>	2	2	3	0
<i>v. Marc. Acoem.*</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>v. Alex. Acoem.</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>v. Dan. Styl.</i>	4	1	0	1
<i>v. Porph.</i>	0	1	0	0
<i>v. Pelag. Ant.</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>v. Dalm.</i>	1	0	1	0
Daniel Scet., <i>log.</i>	4	0	0	0
Cyril Scyth. <i>vitae</i>	9	0	9	5
<i>v. Syncl. Jord.*</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>v. Thgn.*</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>v. Nicol. Sion.</i>	13	0	0	0
<i>v. Eutych.</i>	0	0	3	0
<i>v. Golind.</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>v. Matron. Perg.</i>	9	0	0	0
Thdr Pet., <i>v. Thds.</i>	6	0	0	0
<i>v. Mar. Aeg.</i>	1	0	0	0
Jo. Mosch, <i>prat.</i>	20	5	4	0
<i>v. Thdr. Syc.</i>	4	4	1	1
<i>v. Georg. Choz.</i>	2	1	0	0
<i>v. Spyr.*</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>v. Sym.</i>	4	1	1	0
<i>v. Jo. Eleēm.</i>	3	5	9	1
Total (out of 197):	104	38	39	16
Chronological				
4th–5th cent. (16 texts):	22	22	11	9

Table 3.1 (*continued*)

	<i>εὐλογία/ blessing</i>	<i>ἐλεημοσύνη/ alms</i>	<i>προσφορά/ offering</i>	<i>καρποφορία/ fruitbearing</i>
6th–7th cent. (17 texts):	82	16	28	7
Provenance				
Pal/Cyprus (13 texts):	56	16	29	8
All others (20 texts):	48	22	10	8

late Late Pal/Cyp (10 texts):	50	12	23	6
All others (23 texts):	54	26	16	10

Notes: Above middle line indicates fourth-/fifth-century texts; below line, sixth-/seventh-century; **bold** print indicates probable Palestinian-Cyprian origin; * indicates texts scanned by sight; for abbreviations, see nn. 2 and 3.

Table 3.2 Blessing (εὐλογία) Given as Hospitality or Healing Talisman

		3 Hospitality	1 Healing Talisman
<i>h.mon.</i>	out of 4 total	3	1
<i>b.Laus.</i>	out of 1	1	0
<i>v.Hyp.</i>	out of 8	3	5
<i>v.Melan.Jn.</i>	out of 2	1	1
<i>v.Dalm.</i>	out of 1	1	0
Daniel Scet. <i>log.</i>	out of 4	2	1
Cyril Scyth. <i>vitae</i>	out of 9	3	0
<i>v.Syncl.Jord.</i>	out of 1	1	0
<i>v.Thgn.</i>	out of 2	2	0
<i>v.Nicol.Sion.</i>	out of 13	7	0
<i>v.Golind.</i>	out of 1	0	1
Jo. Mosch, <i>prat.</i>	out of 20	3	1
<i>v.Thdr.Syc.</i>	out of 4	3	1
<i>v.Georg.Choz.</i>	out of 2	1	0
<i>v.Symn</i>	out of 4	2	0
Total	out of 34	33	11

Notes: This table includes only works in which a *eulogia* refers to a hospitality gift or healing talisman; but as the table indicates, not all of the references (i.e., not all the total references to *eulogiai*) in these works refer to either.

expressions of love, compassion, or compunction,¹³ to hope of being saved on Judgment Day, since “blessed are the merciful (*eleēmōnes*), for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).¹⁴ Alms are only depicted as being given to poor monks, female monks, “the poor,” strangers, beggars, and prisoners.¹⁵ No saint is depicted as receiving alms, however poor he or she might be. But hagiography usually does not specify who receives alms or why. Instead, it tends to stress the

quantity given,¹⁶ or rather, the degree of effort or lack of effort involved: almsgivers either strain to give alms “beyond their ability,” or do so easily, due to a prior receipt of blessings from God.¹⁷

We turn to offerings. In Greek hagiography, all offerings are destined for God, and they are the only type of gift that God receives. Both lay people and holy people give offerings, and both do so mainly in the form of a eucharist. Otherwise, holy people give only spiritual or immaterial things (prayers, vigils, liturgical services, souls), and lay people give only material things (bread, wine, oil, liturgical cloth or vessels, cash, and so on). Such lay offerings to God are said to “receive a reward”;¹⁸ but in one instance it is more specifically stated that the offering is given to ensure that a holy person might pray to God for its lay donor.¹⁹ Thus, unlike blessings, alms, or fruitbearings (see next paragraph), offerings might be represented as being given to procure intercession through the spiritual services of holy people. As that implies, such material lay offerings also gave holy people the means to provide God with immaterial offerings of their own.

Finally, fruitbearings are the most circumscribed religious gift surveyed here. Always given to holy people, they are never given to God or to lay people. Although in one instance they are given to holy people by other holy people (by old monks to help new monks build cells),²⁰ they are otherwise always depicted as coming from lay people. Mostly depicted in the form of cash or victuals,²¹ they are also frequently described (unlike offerings, blessings, or alms) as contributing to the construction or enhancement of a church, monastery, shrine, or tomb.²² At one point, it is explained that fruitbearings to monasteries are tantamount to offerings to God, and that all monastic possessions belong to God, “having come from fruitbearings.”²³ But it is also clear that holy people themselves were the intended recipients of such gifts. For example, one monastery is said to have given all the fruitbearings it received to the poor, since its monks already had obtained enough for themselves through manual labor.²⁴ In two instances, a fruitbearing is given to thank a saint for a healing he had performed; in one of these instances it is declined.²⁵

Such are the basic circumstantial differences between blessings, alms, offerings, and fruitbearings detectable within the narrow limits of my hagiographical survey. To use Ilana Silber’s categories, offerings might be classified as sacrificial gifts; both blessings and fruitbearings, as sacerdotal gifts; and alms as charitable gifts. But the survey indicates that the differences and relationships between these gifts were more complex than that schema allows. As we have seen, fruitbearings were conceived as tantamount to offerings belonging to God, so that both might be classified as sacrificial gifts, while blessings were given both to holy people and to lay people, so that both might also be counted as charitable gifts. Yet the survey also makes clear that blessings, alms, offerings, and fruitbearings were not equivalent terms in the minds of early Byzantine hagiographers and religious professionals. How, then, might we schematize the differences and relationships between these four types of gifts?

One way is to consider the direction of their “flow,” that is, the ability or inability of each type of gift to provide material for another. Hagiographers never depict

more than two types of religious gift in any particular passage. Nevertheless, as noted above, certain passages depict alms coming from blessings,²⁶ and blessings as coming from offerings.²⁷ Assuming these passages reflect a coherent logic or consistent tradition, we might say that from offerings come blessings come alms (i.e., alms might be given out of a supply of material blessings, which might have been produced by an original supply of offerings). But evidently this flow could not occur in the other direction: offerings are never depicted as coming from blessings, or either from alms. Indeed, while blessings are depicted as being given to everybody, alms are solely depicted as being given to the poor, the disadvantaged, or the bereft. What might explain this?

The answer seems to lie in an association of alms with sin. This was not, of course, an essential aspect of alms. The literal meaning of the word *eleēmosynē* is “mercy.” Thus, in Greek to “give alms” was first and foremost to “give mercy.” Since that was something the Christian God and his saints were both expected to do, both they and their imitators are frequently called “merciful” (*eleēmones*) and thus “almsgivers” in hagiography. Such giving, however, was often not easy. For just as God felt obliged out of selfless mercy to sacrifice his own son to save the sinners of the world, so too hagiographers sometimes depict saints as having to give all they have – even to the extent of selling themselves into slavery – to “give mercy” to that world. But hagiographers sometimes also depict saintly almsgivers as giving alms to receive a merciful salvation for themselves as well. For example, Melania the Younger is said to have given alms “as if by this alone she hoped to obtain mercy – for as the Lord said, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy’” (Matthew 5:7).²⁸ As that indicates, we are dealing with a gift that might imply both the pursuit of personal interest and reciprocation (i.e., the pursuit of personal salvation and the receipt of divine mercy) and the need for such pursuit: indeed, a Christian gift that implied prior transgressions or sin. Such gifts evidently seemed sufficiently tainted to be inappropriate to be given either to God or his holy people. That judgment is conveyed in the *Life of Pelagia the Harlot*. When Pelagia, as part of her reform from a life of prostitution, decides to dispose of all her ill-gotten gains as charity, the local bishop decrees that none of it could enter either the church or the bishop’s palace. Instead, it had to be given to widows, orphans, the destitute, and the poor, so that “all her wealth from sin might become a treasury of righteousness.”²⁹

In other words, such materials “from sin” could not be converted into offerings, blessings, or fruitbearings. Given the potential connection between almsgiving, sin, and a sinner’s pursuit of personal redemption, it is not surprising that there are far fewer references to alms than to offerings, blessings, or fruitbearings in early Byzantine hagiography, or that early Byzantine practices of almsgiving often seem to differ little from the self-interestedness of traditional Greco-Roman practices of civic benefaction. Both practices used gifts to obtain positive expressions of honor (or forgiveness) from recipients who might otherwise think their donors unworthy (or uncharitable). The *Life of John the Almsgiver*, for example, neatly collapses the two traditions in one story about almsgiving by describing how a group of North

African beggars warmed themselves in the cold winter sun “by praising and praying on behalf” of each house whose owner they knew had once given them alms, while cursing those that had not.³⁰ Here the poor function not only as recipients of mercy but as dispensers of honor and intercessors for divine mercy in return. Hagiography offers no similar depiction of reciprocity involving a blessing. Depictions of offerings, however, do provide parallels. As noted above, offerings are also sometimes given to receive a reward from God. To achieve that purpose, offerings, like alms, are given to a mediating party who might pray on a donor’s behalf. Unlike alms, however, offerings are never depicted as being given in pursuit of mercy for a prior sin: Greek hagiography only alludes to a hope for some future benefit or blessing (the same may be said for fruitbearings, although with these it is not so clear).

To use anthropological distinctions, Greek hagiography presents blessings as disinterested gifts (no reciprocation is depicted or suggested), while alms and offerings represent both self-interested gifts given to obtain services from their recipients and rewards from God. Indeed, the language and imagery of Greek hagiography indicate that alms and offerings were both imagined to function by binding their donors to their recipients through memory. This pattern appears in the *Life of John the Almsgiver* where, in the story of North African beggars mentioned above, a loaf of bread given as an alms to a beggar is explicitly called a “memento” of its donor.³¹ Elsewhere in the hagiography the saintly bishop John is said to have been given a quilt so that he might be “wrapped in the memory of the [rich lay person] who had offered it.”³² Note that hagiography does not censure such self-interested lay gifts. As we have seen, however, it does dictate that they had to be given to their proper recipients. Hence the need to reject or give away such gifts when given to the wrong recipient: thus, John the Almsgiver is said to have sold the quilt that had been “offered” to him (rather than God), and to have given the proceeds to the poor. In fact, any suspect gift, once separated from its self-interested lay donor and converted by the intentions of a saint, could be given to anyone, whether holy or lay, as a blessing.³³

What emerges from Greek hagiography is the existence in early Byzantium of a highly differentiated, functional, and flexible repertoire of Christian gifts, each suited to different religious needs, recipients, and concerns. To summarize its schematic logic: Alms were charitable gifts given either to display mercy or to obtain mercy, which it did by prompting positive remembrance among those likely to have suffered from a donor’s past transgressions or sins. Because they were closely associated with sin, it was not appropriate that they be received by either God or holy people. Offerings were sacrificial gifts given to thank God and obtain future benefits through liturgical remembrances of holy people; because such gifts were meant to thank God, they could not be given to thank a holy person, and therefore sometimes had to be rejected or converted. Fruitbearings, however, though little discussed here, were sacerdotal gifts that seem to have been given to thank holy people, perhaps for some intercessory service. Yet, as one example suggests, if given to thank a saint for God’s work – a healing performed through a

saint – then this too had to be rejected or given away by the saint. Blessings, finally, reflected only God’s own divine, impersonal benevolence. They therefore carried no human taint or need to reciprocate. This made them ideal not only as charitable gifts but as sacerdotal gifts, whether given by lay people to support holy people, or by holy people to support others. Thus, while alms and offerings appear in hagiography as self-interested Christian gifts that expected some kind of reward or return, blessings are depicted only as being freely given – a point underscored by hagiography’s regular identification of blessings with such “natural” things as water, trees, or the power to heal, which God had given to humans *dōrea*, “for free” (cf. Matthew 10:8, where Jesus commissions the apostles: “Tend the sick, raise the dead, purify lepers, expel demons; and as you received for free, give for free”).³⁴

Disinterested Gifts in an Interested Discourse

It may seem naïve to insist on the disinterested dimension or “purity” of the Christian blessing. Many scholars emphasize that there can be no such thing as a pure or disinterested gift, that all such ideals represent some form of conscious or unconscious deception masking the desires of givers or receivers to bond, advance themselves, or gain, and that, furthermore, the main goal in studying gifts should be to expose this underlying, self-interested reality. Indeed, there is no question that the Christian blessing represents a more complex phenomenon than the foregoing describes. Besides the notorious evidence that exists of church leaders’ use of blessings to bribe members of the imperial court (Batiffol 1919: 154–79), we have ample evidence, both hagiographical and otherwise, that blessings were used to mark status and enforce relationships of dependency within the religious hierarchy itself (Caner 2006: 364–70). Moreover, if hagiographers sought to depict their subjects in such a way as to attract patronage (as maintained by, e.g., Déroche 1996, Mango 1997), it might be surmised that their depiction of disinterested blessings represents a deliberate mystification intended to win as many lay blessings for churches and monasteries as possible, woven into a discourse calculated to mask the real economic ambitions of religious institutions.

Such reductionism would, however, risk missing or misunderstanding both the spiritual and the historical significance of the blessing phenomenon. In the first place, it is not at all clear that hagiography was written primarily for lay readers. Equally, if not more, likely as an intended audience would have been clerics and monks. Though perhaps not all saints’ lives provided “a monastic rule in narrative form” (as Gregory of Nazianzus said of the *Life of Antony*, *oratio* 21.5), nonetheless only religious professionals could have been expected to understand all the scriptural allusions and references to institutional practices found within the hagiographical texts surveyed above. For example, the fact that the authors of these texts often refer to “three *eulogiai*” being given by monks or clerics to their guests without explaining what such *eulogiai* are (i.e., without explaining that they are items given as food or drink), or why they are given in sets of three, suggests

that these authors assumed their readers would have been familiar with the practice of issuing supplemental *eulogia* bread rations in three-loaf sets to monks within a coenobium (Caner 2006: 345–49). This assumption implies monastic or clerical readers. And for such readers, mystification was arguably the whole point. As the sixth-century hagiographer Cyril of Scythopolis explains through the words of a saint, such fledgling holy people needed to lose their “human way of thinking” when dealing with the material resources of their religious institutions, as in other matters (*v.Euthym.* 17; Caner 2008: 226–27). Indeed, if hagiography is to be understood as an “interested” discourse, then we must at least recognize that it was most fundamentally interested in depicting and inculcating ideals and practices that were alien to the worldly rest of society. The seriousness of its idealism regarding religious wealth and gift-giving is evident not only in its consistent distinctions between blessings and other types of Christian gifts, but in its repeated examples of how blessings should be properly handled, or of how suspect gifts might be transformed into blessings when properly handled, as by Christian saints.

Anthropology suggests that something like this is what we might expect to find in a society with a salvation religion where holy people live on material contributions from lay admirers. In his study of Jain religion and society in southern India, James Laidlaw has emphasized the importance of its complex, hierarchical repertoire of religious gifts for addressing the different needs, intentions, and interactions within a Jain community. High among the five distinct gift types in this repertoire is one called the *supatra dan*. Considered more meritorious than the types of gifts used to fulfill a layperson’s sense of ambition, duty, or compassion, this “gift to a worthy recipient” is reserved for supporting the Jain spiritual elite, that is, the ascetic renouncers who live in a state of economic dependence on the Jain laity. To maintain their religious purity and detachment, these Jain monks handle such gifts, usually given in the form of food, in such a way as to minimize their sense of having received any gift at all. For example, when a *dan* gift of food is left to be collected from a lay kitchen, no greeting or words of thanks are exchanged, nothing is directly given, and all that is taken is pooled at the Jain monastery so as to hide any trace of its original source. This arrangement is meant to totally depersonalize the process of gift-giving. Although Jain lay people expect to be eventually rewarded with good karma for this practice (and so the *supatra dan* is not disinterested as far as those lay people are concerned), no obligation to reciprocate is thought to attend Jain monks who live on them. The result, Laidlaw observes, “comes as close as we can fairly expect a practical solution ever to get” to achieving a pure gift ideal (Laidlaw 2002: 51).

Early Byzantium presents parallels to what Laidlaw has found in Jain society. As with Jain renouncers, one of the chief attributes ascribed to Christian holy people was *katharotēs*, a state of “purity” that seems to have been considered nearly tantamount to holiness (*v.Marc.Acoem.* 3; cf. Lampe 1961 s.v. καθαρότης). Like the *supatra dan*, one important feature of the Christian blessing was its perceived impersonality. Both gifts, Christian and Jain, imply the absence of obligation to make a return to donors, thereby helping their ascetic recipients preserve their

sense of purity and detachment. Indeed, this perceived need of a spiritual elite to preserve a sense of purity and detachment may offer the best clue for understanding the historical emergence and importance of the blessing ideal in early Byzantium. Jonathan Parry has argued that pure gift ideals tend to emerge when such societies perceive a need to protect valued institutions from the potentially corrupting forms of commercial exchange on which those institutions have otherwise come to depend. In other words, the pure gift ideal may be seen as a response to the close coexistence of preferably separate but unavoidably linked spheres of interest: one associated with the long-term prosperity of the community as a whole, the other with an individual's short-term advancement or gain. According to Parry, the pure, disinterested gift emerges from a perceived need to insulate the values of the former from the ways of the latter. As he notes, some societies even develop practices whereby suspect currencies can be transformed into gifts or tokens that can be safely used to support the valued institutions (Parry and Bloch 1989: 22–31).

This describes in anthropological terms what we find in early Byzantium. Two basic developments of late Roman or early Byzantine Christianity were, on the one hand, a close but not total integration of church and state, and, on the other hand, a division of Christian society into two distinct but mutually dependent spheres of interest: a “holy” sphere of saints, churches, monasteries, clerics, and monks, and a “worldly” sphere of ordinary Christian laypeople (e.g., Brown 1988: 205–338). By the fifth century, the former had even come to regard itself (encouraged in no small part by hagiographers) as an aristocracy superior to that of the traditional aristocracy of the late Roman world – superior, but also financially dependent on the latter's material wealth. As noted above, it was precisely in this period and setting that gifts called blessings rose to prominence in church and monastic literature. Such gifts may represent a theoretical and practical effort to mediate between these two Christian spheres and protect holy people in their social and financial engagements with that “oily, present-giving” lay world.

Because of its symbolic and practical importance for this emergent aristocracy, the blessing became the central, mediating term within the early Byzantine repertoire of Christian gifts. Of course, many questions remain, including how the history of blessings might be related to that of fruitbearings, the most uncertain gifts within the repertoire, which seem to diminish in hagiographical prominence just as references to blessings increase. But such questions, as well as a reevaluation of Mauss based on an exploration of repertoires of charitable gift-giving in other great traditions of antiquity such as Judaism and Islam, must await a future study.

Notes

- 1 2 Corinthians 9:5–12 (terms discussed here are underlined): ⁵ ἀναγκαῖον οὖν ἡγησάμην παρακαλέσαι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς, ἵνα προέλθωσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν τὴν προεπηγγελμένην εὐλογίαν ὑμῶν, ταύτην ἑτοιμὴν εἶναι οὕτως ὡς εὐλογίαν καὶ μὴ ὡς πλεονεξίαν.⁶ Τοῦτο δέ, ὁ σπείρων φειδομένως φειδομένως καὶ θερίσει, ἐπ'εὐλογίας,

ἐπ'εὐλογίαις καὶ θερίσει.⁷ ἕκαστος καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐκ λύπης ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. ἰλαρὸν γὰρ δότιν ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεός.⁸ δυνατεῖ δὲ ὁ θεὸς πᾶσαν χάριν περισσεῦσαι εἰς ὑμᾶς, ἵνα ἐν παντὶ πάντοτε πᾶσαν αὐτάρκειαν ἔχοντες περισσεύητε εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν.⁹ καθὼς γέγραπται, ἔσκόρποσεν, ἔδωκεν τοῖς πένησιν, ἡ δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.¹⁰ ὁ δὲ ἐπιχορηγῶν σπóρον τῷ σπείροντι καὶ ἄρτον εἰς βρώσιν χορηγήσει καὶ πληθυνεῖ τὸν σπóρον ὑμῶν καὶ αὐξήσει τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν.¹¹ ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα, ἥτις κατεργάζεται δι' ἡμῶν εὐχαριστίαν τῷ θεῷ.¹² ὅτι ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταυτῆς οὐ μόνον ἐστὶν προσαναπληροῦσα τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν ἁγίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ περισσεύουσα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστῶν τῷ θεῷ.

- 2 Listed as they appear in the table, that is, in probable chronological order: *v.Anton.* = Athanasius of Alexandria, *vita Antonii*, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink, *Athanasie d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine* (Paris, 2004); *v.Macr.* = Gregory of Nyssa, *de vita Macrinae*, ed. P. Maraval, *Grégoire de Nyse: Vie de sainte Macrine* (Paris, 1971); *v.Gr.Thaum.* = Gregory of Nyssa, *vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* (PG 46: 893–957); *b.mon.* = *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. A.-J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (Brussels, 1971); *b.Laus.* = Palladius, *Historia lausiaca*, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink, *Palladio: La storia Lausiaca* (Verona, 1974); *b.rel.* = Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa*, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molingen, *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977, 1979); *v.Syncl.* = Ps.-Athanasius, *vita Syncreticae*, ed. L. Abelarga, *The Life of Saint Syncretica: Introduction, Critical Text, Commentary* (Thessalonica, 2002); *v.Hyp.* = Callinicus, *vita Hypatii*, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink, *Callinicos: Vie d'Hypatios* (Paris, 1971); *v.Aux.* = anon., *vita Auxentii*, PG 114.1377–1436; *v.Pach.Gr.* = anon., *vita Pachomii graeca prima*, ed. F. Halkin, *Le corpus athénien de saint Pachome* (Geneva, 1982); *v.Melan.Jn.* = Gerontius, *vita Melaniae junioris*, ed. D. Gorce, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie* (Paris, 1962); *v.Alex.Acoem.* = anon., *vita Alexandri Acoemeti*, ed. E. de Stoop, *Vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète*, PO 6: 645–704; *v.Dan.Styl.* = anon., *vita Danielis Stylitae*, ed. H. Delehay, *Les saints stylites* (Brussels, 1923); *v.Porph.* = Mark the Deacon, *vita Porphyrii episcopi Gazensis*, ed. H. Grégoire and M.-A. Kugener, *Marc le Diacre: Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza* (Paris, 1930); *v.Pelag.Ant.* = anon., *vita Pelagiae Antiochae*, ed. B. Flusin in *Pélagie la Pénitente: Métamorphoses d'une légende* (Paris, 1981); Daniel Scet., *logoi*=Daniel of Scete de *Homicidio, Marcus salus, de Mendico caeco, Thomais Alexandrina, de Virgine ebria, Eulogius latomus, Andronicus et Athanasia, Anastasia Patricia*, ed. B. Dahlman, *Saint Daniel of Sketis: A Group of Hagiographic Texts Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Uppsala, 2007); Cyril Scyth. *vitae*=Cyril of Scythopolis, *vita Abramii* (v. Abr.), *vita Cyriaci* (v. Cyriac.), *vita Euthymii* (v. Euthym.), *vita Iohannis Hesychastae* (v. Jo.Hes.), *vita Sabae* (v. Sab.), *vita Theodosii* (v. Thds.), *vita Theognii* (v. Thgn.), ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig, 1939); *v.Syncl.Jord.* = anon., *vita Syncreticae*, ed. B. Flusin and J. Paramelle, “De Syncretica in Deserto Jordanis (BHG 1318w),” *AB* 100 (1982): 291–317; *v.Nicol.Sion.* = anon., *vita Nicolai Sionitae*, ed. I. Sevcenko and N.P. Sevcenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline, MA, 1984); *v.Eutyech.* = Eustratius, *vita Eutychiei*, ed. C. Laga, *Eustratii presbyteri vita Eutychiei* (Turnhout, 1992); *v.Golind.* = Eustratius, *vita Golinduch*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta hierosolymitikes stachylogias* (St. Petersburg, 1897–98): 4.149–74, 5.395–96; Thdr. Pet., *v.Thds.* = Theodore of Petra, *vita Theodosii coenobiarchae*, ed. H. Usener, *Der heilige Theodosios: Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrrillos* (Leipzig, 1890); *v.Mar.Aeg.* = Sophronius of Jerusalem, *vita Mariae Aegyptiacae*, PG 87:3.3697–3726; Jo.Mosch., *prat.* = John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, PG 87:3.2852–3112, E. Mioni,

- “Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanni Mosco,” *OCP* 17 (1951): 83–94, T. Nissen, “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938): 354–72; *v.Thdr.Syc.* = Gregory of Syceon, *vita Theodori Syceotae*, ed A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon* (Brussels, 1970); *v.Georg.Choz.* = Antonius of Choziba, *vita Georgii Chozebitae*, ed. C. Houze, “Sancti Georgii Chozebitae auctore Antonio eius discipulo,” *AB* 7 (1888): 95–144, 336–59; *v.Sym.*, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* = Leontius of Neapolis, *vita Symeonis Sali*, *vita Iohannis Eleemosynarii*, ed. A.-J. Festugière and L. Rydén, *Léontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre* (Paris, 1974).
- 3 Listed as they appear in the table, that is, in probable chronological order: *v.Marc. Acoem.* = anon., *vita Marcelli Acoemeti*, ed. G. Dagron, “La vie ancienne de saint Marcel l’Acémète,” *AB* 86 (1968): 271–321; *v.Dalm.* = anon., *vita Dalmatii*, ed. A. Banduri, *Imperium orientale, sive antiquitates Constantinopolitanae*, vol.2.3 (Paris, 1743), 609–710; *v.Thgn.* = Paul of Elusa, *vita Theognii*, ed. J. Van den Gheyn, “Acta Sancti Theogni,” *AB* 10 (1892): 73–113; *v.Matron.Perg.* = anon., *vita Matronae Pergensis*, *ASS Novembris* 3 (Brussels, 1910): 790–813; *v.Spyr.* = Theodore of Paphos, *vita Spyridonis*, ed. P. van den Ven, *La Légende de S. Spyridon Évêque de Trimithonte* (Louvain, 1953). These had not been entered into TLG at the time of writing.
 - 4 The survey is not exhaustive because I have excluded martyr accounts and *apophthegmata patrum*, as well as Sophronius of Jerusalem’s *v.Cyri et Joannis* and the *v.Symeonis Stylitae junioris*, both of which deal mainly with healings (and therefore focus almost exclusively on *eulogiai*). Otherwise it includes all Greek hagiography of which I am aware. The survey is not perfect, partly because in some cases the dates are not secure (e.g., some believe *v.Porph.* is a seventh-century text), partly because I had to scan five of the texts by sight (see above, n. 3) and may have missed a reference, partly because I have not included passages where gifts are clearly being given, but no noun is used to identify what specific type of gift is being given, and partly because sometimes it is completely unclear whether a reference is to a material or immaterial gift. I have sought to include only those that I believe refer to material examples of blessings, alms, offerings, or fruitbearings, and thus have sought to exclude all figurative, spiritual, or immaterial (e.g., *v.Dalm.* has three references to a *eulogia*, but only the second instance refers to a material gift, so only that instance is counted). I have omitted all references that I thought too ambiguous.
 - 5 See below, nn. 6, 8, and 9.
 - 6 Cyril Scyth., *v.Euthym.* 47 (2x), *v.Jo.Hes.* 20, *v.Thds.* 3; Jo. Mosch., *prat.* 157 (2x), Mioni 3, Nissen 13; Thdr. Pet., *v.Thds.*, pp. 27, 28; *v.Spyr.*, p. 45; *v.Georg.Choz.* 25; *v.Sym.* 158; *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 9 (cf. prol.), notably all sixth- and seventh-century texts of Palestinian-Cyprian origin.
 - 7 *v.Thdr.Syc.* 30; Cyril Scyth., *v.Euthym.* 39; cf. Jo. Mosch., *prat.* 86.
 - 8 Daniel Scet. *log.* 6 (gold), *v.Nicol.Sion.* 24 (3x, harvest), *v.Spyr.*, p. 10 (water), *v.Jo. Eleēm.* prol., 40 (gold).
 - 9 Cyril Scyth., *v.Euthym.* 17, 39; *v.Sab.* 66 (bread, wine, water); *v.Nicol.Sion.* 60 (3x, water); Jo.Mosch., *prat.* 80 (water); *v.Georg.Choz.* 37 (bread, wine).
 - 10 Explicit in all depictions of blessings given by God to lay people (see n. 8) and implied in many depicting blessings given by him to holy people.
 - 11 *v.Dalm.* 697DF: πάντες οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ... φέροντες προσφοράς εἰς τὰς χεῖρας ... ἐν τῷ ἔρχεσθαι τοὺς ἀδελφούς ἐν τῷ πυλεῶνι αἰτοῦντας λαμβάνειν τὴν παρὰ αὐτῶν εὐλογία. Cf. Jo.Mosch., *prat.* 42.

- 12 Service to Christ or Theotokos: *v.Hyp.* 31; *v.Georg.Choz.* 11.
- 13 Compunction, *b.mon.* 23, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 27; lesson in love, *v.Syncl.*, lines 730–31; compassion, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 27.
- 14 *v.Sym.* 167, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 23; *v.Melan.Jn.* 30, citing Matt 5:7.
- 15 Poor women, female monks: *b.Laus.* 41, 47, *v.Jo.Eleēm.*, 22; “the poor and poor monks”: *v.Hyp.* 31, cf. *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 23 (gyrovague monk with girl); “the poor”: *v.Melan.Jn.* 30; Jo.Mosch., *prat.* 9, 40, *v.Jo.Eleēm.*, 22, 27; beggars: Jo.Mosch, *prat.* 9, 40; *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol.; strangers: *v.Pach.gr.* 4, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol.; prisoners: *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol.
- 16 E.g., *v.Porph.* 52, *v.Hyp.* 31, *v.Pach.gr.* 39, *v.Melan.Jn.* 15.
- 17 Given “beyond power” (ὐπὲρ δόναμιν): *v.Georg.Choz.* 11; *v.Sym.* 167; givers reduced to theft, poverty, sale of Gospels or self to obtain material for alms: *b.Laus.* 44; *v.Pach.gr.* 39, Jo.Mosch., *prat.* 184, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol., 22, 23; given easily after receipt of blessings: *v.Georg.Choz.* 11, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol..
- 18 Cyril Scyth., *v.Euthym.* 50, ed. Schwartz, p. 73: παρ’ αὐτοῦ λαμβάνουσιν τὸν μισθόν. Cf. *v.Hyp.* 15.9.
- 19 *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 25.
- 20 *b.mon.* 20.11.
- 21 Sacks of pulse, grain: Cyril Scyth., *v.Sab.* 45, *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 9; cf. *b.mon.* 14.18.
- 22 *b.mon.* 20.11, *v.Hyp.* 15.9, 51.11, Cyril Scyth., *v.Thds.* 5.
- 23 Cyril Scyth., *v.Euthym.* 50; cf. *v.Hyp.* 15.9.
- 24 *v.Hyp.* 18.1.
- 25 *b.Laus.* 18.11, *v.Hyp.* 12.12 (both in thanks for healings); in *v.Hyp.* 12.12, the gift is refused.
- 26 *v.Georg.Choz.* 11; *v.Jo.Eleēm.* prol.; cf. *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 19, although it is unclear whether the item sold to give to the poor is *prosphora* or a *karpophoria*.
- 27 See above, n. 11.
- 28 *v.Melan.Jn.* 30, p. 184: τὴν δὲ ἐλεημοσύνην οὕτως κατώρθωσεν, ὥς ἐξ αὐτῆς μόνης ἐλεηθῆναι ἐλπίζουσα.
- 29 *v.Pelag.Ant.* 39; p. 89: ὁ πᾶς τῆς ἁμαρτίας πλοῦτος γένηται θησαυρός τῆς δικαιοσύνης. Interestingly (but as often), no precise term is used for any gift in this hagiography.
- 30 *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 20, p. 368.
- 31 *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 21, p. 369: ἵνα σχῇ μου μνημόσυνον ὁ πτωχός.
- 32 *v.Jo.Eleēm.* 19, p. 366: σκέπεσθαι εἰς τὸ μνημονεύειν ... τοῦ προσενέγκαντος.
- 33 As exemplified in passages that show blessings coming from offerings as in *v.Dalm.* 697DF.
- 34 Rain described as a *eulogia* and a *dōrea* from God: Cyril Scyth., *v.Sab.* 66; *v.Nicol.Sion.* 60; Jo.Mosch., *prat.* 80; healing as a *dōrea*: *v.Hyp.* 22, 28.

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Further Reading

Remarkably little of a general nature has been written on Christian gift-giving in late antiquity or early Byzantium. The following studies should be read in conjunction with those already cited in this chapter. For depictions of gift-giving and their relation to church economy and cult, see Déroche 1995: esp. 238–54, and Déroche 2006. Fundamental for offerings to churches and monasteries are Thomas 1987 and Wipzsycka 1972. All other studies treat Christian gift-giving under the rubric of almsgiving, mainly in the early (third- to fifth-century) period. See Harvey 1994; Finn 2006; Brown 2008; Meyer 2008. A comprehensive study of Christian wealth and gift-giving in the fourth- to sixth-century West is promised by Peter Brown. For more on Jain practices, see Laidlaw 1995.

Gift-Giving and Power Relationships in Greek Social Praxis and Public Discourse

MARC DOMINGO GYGAX

Power can be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of another person or group in accord with one's own intentions, and a relationship of power can be defined as a social relationship in which one or more individuals exercises such power.¹ There are many mechanisms by which power over others can be exercised, including violence, threats, and persuasion. One such mechanism – a priori diametrically opposed to violence – is granting gifts. I say “a priori” because, as we have learned from Marcel Mauss and other anthropologists and sociologists drawing on his work, in many societies gifts are less generous and less apt to produce solidarity than they might seem at first (Sahlins 1965; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Bourdieu 1990: 98–111; Godelier 1999). Gifts often place a considerable obligation on recipients through pressure to perform reciprocal acts of generosity. By acting strategically, therefore, one can use gifts to get what one wants from another group or person.

This dynamic is particularly apparent in ancient Greek society. Many sources – from the Homeric poems to Hellenistic inscriptions – recall the debt generated by gifts and the significance of giving in return.² The compulsion for reciprocity involved in gift-giving seems to have been more important for the Greeks than it is in our culture – although I do not mean to imply that the Greeks did not know the unselfish gift (the pure gift) or, conversely, that in modern Western society givers do not sometimes, perhaps always, expect counter gifts.³ In ancient Greece, there was little ambiguity about the fact that gifts required gifts, and not just any gifts but equivalent gifts, that is gifts that, evaluated from the perspective of the costs for the reciprocating group or person and the giver's risks and benefits, represented

equivalent acts of generosity and solidarity.⁴ The power of gifts shaped relationships of power among individuals within communities, as well as between the united community and its members or external agents. Gifts allowed control to be exercised by citizens over their fellow citizens; by poleis over some of their members; by poleis over other poleis or foreigners (kings, officers, or average citizens); and by individuals over poleis to which they did not belong.

One way in which gifts served to establish power and control over the actions and decisions of others was bribery. In some situations, gifts could be used to coerce magistrates, members of popular juries, voters in the assembly, military commanders, kings, and even entire cities; and to judge from our sources, bribery was a grave problem, for example, in classical Athens (Harvey 1985; Taylor 2001a, 2001b; Conover 2010). But not all gifts offered within relationships of power were “bad” gifts. Although the positive or negative quality of a gift is often a matter of subjective assessment, there were “good” gifts, which is to say, gifts that were accepted, recognized, and even promoted by the state. It is this type of gift that will be the focus of this paper.

In the discussion that follows, I – like Marcel Hénaff in another chapter in this volume – use “gift” in a comprehensive sense that includes not only material objects but services. In the original Greek, the most common terms for “gift” are *dōrea* and *dōron*. *Dōrea* is the word used most often to refer to gifts sanctioned by the state (e.g., Dem. 20. 35; Aeschin. 3. 236; *IG* II² 682 = *Syll.*³ 409), while *dōron* is the most widespread word for bribes⁵ (which is not to say that a *dōron* is always a bribe; the “good” gift is often referred to as a *dōron* as well⁶). Another significant term is *energesia* (“benefaction”), which includes both gifts and services. Although this paper is concerned with the praxis of gift-exchange, I also examine the rhetoric surrounding this praxis: how Greek poleis emphasized the gift character of actions; how, depending on the circumstances, they pursued the opposite objective, disguising this condition; and, perhaps most baffling of all, how they attempted to portray as gifts acts that were not gifts. I also comment on the importance of presenting actions or objects as either gifts or counter-gifts, and of highlighting whether such actions or objects surpassed the perceived “value” of the previous gift. I thus consider not only social practices (giving and receiving) but also public discourses surrounding the practice of gift-giving, especially as reflected in inscriptions and forensic literature.

The ability to influence others through gifts depended not only on the power of gifts, on their capacity to render the recipient indebted, but also on the way gifts were presented; as we will see, this rhetoric paid considerable attention to the status of the actors in the exchange. These statuses normally differed, first and foremost, because of the “laws” of gift-exchange themselves (to initiate an exchange was not the same as responding to it); second, because in many exchanges – for example, those between elite and demos, or between polis and king – the players differed in rank, wealth, or military capacity. Gifts not only *generated* power relationships; they fell into preexisting relationships, and the rhetoric of gift-giving had to take this into account.

This paper is, in one sense, a survey of the ways in which gifts, real or fictive, served to create and support relationships of power dominance in the Greek world, with a primary focus on the relationship between individual and community. I proceed chronologically, so that what I present is simultaneously a typology and a history, or, if one prefers, a historical typology that reflects an (arguably unsurprising) evolution from simple forms of domination to more complex ones. In the final section, I focus on discrepancies between the rhetoric and the reality of gift-exchange and on the conditions that made such discrepancies possible.

The Archaic Period

The world of the archaic Greek poleis (eighth to early fifth centuries BCE) was marked by major political, social, and economic inequalities between community elites (the aristocrats) and the mass of nonaristocrats (the demos). Aristocratic contributions in the form of donations for the construction of temples, defense of the city, cult sacrifices, banquets, musical performances, athletic competitions, assistance to the poor, and the like⁷ were seen to some extent as gifts owed to the community. The polis was a unit based on direct and indirect reciprocity between its members; and (as noted above) when Greeks evaluated the equilibrium – the fairness – of gift-exchange, they took into consideration what the gift represented for the giver in terms of cost, effort, and generosity. But not all aristocrats limited themselves to contributing what they owed the group. Many went well beyond those limits, as a way of displaying their social superiority and avoiding the collapse of the basic polis-institutions. In a world full of social and political tensions due to the inequalities referred to above,⁸ giving beyond what one owed was a way to compensate nonaristocrats for the privileges from which they were excluded, or even to create in them a feeling of indebtedness that could only be reciprocated through subordination. Both the sensation of having been compensated and the impression of being indebted promoted acceptance of the status quo and were important elements in the strategies of domination adopted by the archaic aristocracy. In the archaic polis we thus find the most obvious route to domination through gifts: giving when the other has no means to respond other than by voluntary subjection to the rank, authority, and power of the giver.

In poleis where power was in the hands of tyrants, this type of relationship is represented in an extreme form. Tyrants had more means than their fellow aristocrats to make gifts,⁹ and their rivalry with those they had defeated in the struggle for autocracy also put them in greater need of popular support. The Peisistratidae in Athens, for example, attempted to secure the stability of their regime *inter alia* by helping poor peasants, financing the construction of public buildings, and contributing to the Panathenaic festival.¹⁰ The pains the lyric poets take to highlight the munificence of the tyrants they serve (far more so than in the case of aristocrat patrons who were not tyrants; Kurke 1991: 167, 170ff.; 1999: 131) are symptomatic of this dynamic. Thus, Bacchylides says that Hieron “knows

how not to hide his towering wealth in black-cloaked darkness,” while Pindar urges him: “if indeed you love always to hear pleasant things said about you, do not grow too tired of spending.”¹¹ This type of exchange – like the version carried on by aristocrats who tried to dominate the demos in poleis not ruled by tyrants – had its roots in a very old type of relationship: that between the aristocrat of the *oikos* (“household”) and his clients, a relationship in which clients responded to favors granted by the aristocrat not only with occasional help but also – and above all else – with subordination (see Millett 1989: 27; van Wees 1998: 43).

Classical Athens

Given this association between gifts by the elite, the pre-democratic polis and archaic clientelism, as well as the fact that in the classical period such gifts did not lose their manipulative capacity (as we will see below), it comes as no surprise that in fifth-century Athens the demos rejected them. Thanks to the democratic constitution and income from the Delian League, the Athenian demos had both the power to adopt this attitude and the resources to afford it. An anecdote in Plutarch effectively illustrates this opposition to gifts, and is all the more significant because it seems to have a historical background. When Pericles was confronted with the reluctance of the assembly to use public funds for his building program, he offered to pay for it himself, and the demos responded by rejecting his offer and accepting public financing.¹² In fact, the ideal for the demos was not only to liberate itself from the “tyranny” of gifts but to be seen as a donor: the discourse according to which Athens had saved Greece from the Persians,¹³ besides attempting to justify Athens’s right to the empire, was a way to reverse the traditional role of the demos in gift-exchange. This idea appears in an extreme form in Pericles’ funeral oration, where the Athenians are depicted not just as givers but as the most generous kind of givers, because they give without putting the recipient under pressure to reciprocate:

In nobility of spirit, we stand in sharp contrast to most men; for it is not by receiving kindness, but by conferring it, that we acquire our friends. Now he who confers the favor is a firmer friend, in that he is disposed, by continued goodwill toward the recipient, to keep the feeling of obligation alive in him; but he who owes it is more listless in his friendship, knowing that when he repays the kindness it will count, not as a favor bestowed, but as a debt repaid.¹⁴

Despite the demos’s negative response to gifts, some members of the fifth-century Athenian elite insisted on continuing the strategy of domination through demonstrative spending, by taking advantage of the main option available to them: liturgies, which were obligatory services such as sponsoring choruses for festivals, training athletes, or equipping warships – services that were probably requested from the wealthy in some way already in the archaic period¹⁵ and which fifth-century Athens did not abolish, among other reasons because they became a

symbol of the demos's supremacy over the elite. Cimon represents the transition from archaic domination through gifts to this new model. The *Athenaion Politeia* implies that his political power was based in part on his performance of spectacular liturgies, but it also mentions donations to members of his deme, and there is evidence that he contributed to construction projects and to the embellishment of public spaces.¹⁶ By contrast, politicians active after the "revolution of 462" who wanted to pursue this strategy – some, like Pericles or Cleon, did not – had to focus on liturgies. Nicias and Alcibiades are the best-documented cases of what Robert Connor called "the politics of largesse,"¹⁷ an exchange in which the demos reciprocated with active subordination (support in the assembly) rather than with the purely passive subordination of the archaic demos.

In the fourth century, we find a new constellation of political and social factors. Due to the collapse of the Athenian empire, the demos was forced not only to accept gifts from the elite but to request them. Paradoxically, this did not increase the power of the elite, and the use of gifts to control the demos instead became more difficult. Most resources were obtained from the rich through liturgies and extraordinary obligatory contributions (*eisphorai*) rather than through voluntary donations; since many rich men opposed this system and tried to avoid their duties (Cohen 1992: 193–99; Christ 2006: 144–46, 169, 171, 177–78, 180ff.), the polis had to stress that liturgies and *eisphorai* were services it was owed. As Gabriel Herman has observed, every citizen was expected to "contribute in direct proportion to his bodily abilities and economic means."¹⁸ Insistence on this point,¹⁹ together with the suspicion that many wealthy individuals were contributing less than required or were not contributing at all, obscured the generosity of those citizens who volunteered to perform liturgies or performed them in a way that exceeded their obligations. The texts of the orators accordingly reflect the difficulty of trying to distinguish between generous and selfish members of the liturgical class. Individuals who presented themselves as the city's most generous benefactors could be accused of being precisely the opposite (see Christ 1990: 155).

On the other hand, a scarcity of economic resources in fourth-century Athens (particularly after the Social War of 357–355 BCE) led to increasing attempts to attract voluntary gifts from wealthy citizens by offering rewards such as crowns, public praise, and honorific inscriptions (Henry 1983). In other words, the demos made ample use of the type of counter gifts with which it had long rewarded foreigners (but much less often citizens, to avoid the institutionalization of an elite within the citizenry). Although the symbolic capital attached to such honors could help the recipient obtain political support, the demos's relationship to citizens who received honors for gifts was different from that with contributors who had not been honored, because the honor, in principle, represented a cancelation of the debt. If depicting gifts as services due the polis was a rhetorical strategy to avoid the subordination derived from gifts, awarding honors was a nonrhetorical response to the problem. Both donations and honors were *dōreai* (gifts).

In 415 BCE, Alcibiades argued that his fellow citizens owed him an appointment as commander of the Sicilian expedition because he had given so much to the polis (Thuc. 6.16.2–3). For all the reasons mentioned above, arguments such as this became less powerful in fourth-century Athens. As a result, fourth-century politicians could rely less on their money for success than their fifth-century predecessors had, and were forced to depend more on rhetorical skills.²⁰ When Demosthenes had to defend the crown the city had granted him against attacks by his opponent Aeschines, he chose to say little about the services (donations to the reconstruction of walls and to the *theōricon*, the festival fund) for which he had received it,²¹ and focused instead on his performance as a politician and an adviser of the state (see also Dem. 8, 70–73). This would generate more gratitude.

The most remarkable outcome of these fourth-century developments was the spread of the practice of awarding honors to citizens. As I argue in the section that follows, honors played an important role in gift-giving-based power relationships in the Hellenistic world. They allowed the demos to retain some power, but they also facilitated a new discourse depicting elite contributors as benefactors, a discourse that helped the elite gain far more than just honors.

The Hellenistic Period

In the Hellenistic poleis, the demos did not enjoy the political supremacy it had in classical Athens. Although almost every polis claimed to be democratic, there were many constraints on the sovereignty of the people: constitutions limiting the political rights of a substantial portion of the citizens²² or the power of the assembly in relation to the council and the magistrates;²³ insufficient public resources – a chronic problem aggravated by wars and royal taxation – that led to an increasing monopoly on political offices by the minority who could afford to finance them; the rule of kings, which often involved installing garrisons in cities and their territories and appointing officers in the government of the poleis; and cooperation between polis-elites and kings, a symbiotic relationship that reinforced the authority of the elites as well as the influence of the kings (de Ste. Croix 1981: 300–26). Under these conditions, the poleis naturally tended to collect funds from their citizens through the system preferred by the elite: instead of liturgies – already objected to, as noted above, by a significant portion of the fourth-century Athenian elite – voluntary donations, a procedure that ideally allowed contributors to determine the quantity, timing, and destination of their gifts. This may not always have been possible in practice. Some contributors acted under pressure from other members of the elite or even from the demos (Rogers 1991: 91–100). Nor did liturgies entirely disappear.²⁴ But the public discourse about donations was different from that in fourth-century Athens: it presented all contributions as gifts deserving recognition, as numerous inscriptions show.²⁵ A key element in the construction of this discourse was the ritual of awarding honors; the proliferation of such honors contributed significantly to forging the idea that a donor was, above

all else, a benefactor, someone who “had constantly been a good man toward the demos and had benefited in every way the polis publicly and those who meet him privately.”²⁶

In the Hellenistic period honors did not have the same extraordinary character as they had in classical Athens, where granting them to citizens was long avoided. The reciprocation of the demos often consisted not only of honors but of compliance.²⁷ The inscriptions, of course, do not reflect this reaction, and instead stress that benefactors have been reciprocated with honors that measure up to the level of their benefactions.²⁸ But Aristotle was already aware of the kind of exchange one might expect in a polis ruled by benefactors. In a premonitory passage of his *Politics*, he describes an ideal polis, in which the demos accepts the power of the wealthy in return for the money the wealthy spend on political offices, sacrifices, and buildings:

The most supreme offices ... must have expensive duties attached to them, in order that the common people may be willing to be excluded from them, and may feel no resentment against the ruling class, because it pays a high price for office. And it fits in with this that they should offer splendid sacrifices and build up some public monument on entering upon office, so that the common people sharing in the festivities and seeing the city decorated both with votive offerings and with buildings may be glad to see the constitution enduring; and an additional result will be that the notables will have memorials of their outlay. (Arist. *Pol.* 1321A32–41, trans. Rackham)

This does not mean that the elite dominated the demos completely. The demos retained some power, not least through the institution of awarding honors to benefactors. Despite the above-mentioned limitations on the power of the people, there were many democratic elements in the Hellenistic poleis (Gruen 1993: 339–54). Assemblies continued to meet, and some were well attended. Decisions were made in them, and the demos had a say in decisions about who obtained honors. This power could be used to manipulate rivalries among the elite, who were united in their desire to retain euergetism as a system to finance the polis and to maintain their relations to the demos, but were divided when they were forced to compete for honors.

In the foreign relationships of the Hellenistic poleis, honors acquired great importance. They transmitted the idea that the interaction between the polis and the king was a rapport in the tradition of relationships between the sovereign poleis of the classical period and their foreign benefactors (kings or citizens of other poleis), that is, a relationship not between patron and client but between equals, friends who exchanged presents. This was habitually not the case. But the Hellenistic poleis as well as the kings benefited from the fiction, which helped the former bear a humiliating reality, while putting the latter in a more comfortable position in a world hostile to monarchy. A clear example of this use of honors is the phenomenon of taxes paid to kings in the form of the typical rewards for benefactors: gold crowns.

In situations in which honors were a response to gifts by a king, the honors served to mask what was in fact the main component of the countergift: submission.²⁹ The language of royal letters to poleis echoes the true nature of the exchange. Thus Antiochus I or II writes to Erythrae: “[Your envoys] spoke about the goodwill which you have constantly felt toward our house, and in general about the gratitude felt by the people toward all benefactors.” Similarly, Ptolemy III said to Xanthus: “We congratulate you for never failing to maintain the same feelings and for remembering with recognition the benefactions that you have received from me, my father and my grandfather, and we invite you to remain in the same attitude in the future” (*OGIS* 223, trans. Austin 2006: 170; *SEG* xxxvi 1218). But since honors were desired by some kings as much as they were by members of the civic elites, the poleis also used them in a manipulative fashion.³⁰ In such situations, the public discourse was again important. The poleis granted honors to kings with the excuse that the kings were benefactors. That is, the poleis portrayed what were actually gifts aiming at reciprocation as countergifts. By acting this way, they expected – and often obtained – benefits such as autonomy, reduction or exemption from taxes, or money for building projects.³¹ Honors were used in the same way to manage relationships with royal officers (*OGIS* 10; *IG* XII 7. 221b; cf. Gauthier 1985: 142). Nor was the practice a Hellenistic innovation, since it is attested already in the archaic period and becomes widespread in classical Athens, when foreigners often received the honorific titles *energetēs* and *proxenos* in advance of their benefactions (Gauthier 1985: 140–42; Domingo Gygax 2009: 180–82). This shows that the strategy of obtaining countergifts by granting honors was rooted in the capacity of honors to render the honorand indebted rather than in their ability to evoke the benefactor-image of such individuals (an ability that certainly played an important role when the honorands were kings; see Billows 1995: 73–75; Ma 1999: 204–5).

The countergift of the public discourse that was actually a gift existed, for example, when a polis honored as a benefactor a king with whom it had nothing to do or with whom it had been in conflict.³² But many honors fulfilled a double function: they were gifts and countergifts at the same time. They served to reciprocate a small favor (for example, the positive attitude of the king), while at the same time making him indebted with an excessive reward (for example, a festival in his honor).³³ Officially, these were countergifts. But in fact they had more the nature of gifts than of countergifts. They were honors of the type we find in a very different context: in public subscriptions organized by poleis, where citizens were honored as benefactors on the basis of contributions that had merely been promised.³⁴

To depict a gift as a countergift helped conceal the fact that the act of giving sought a benefit. To evaluate the significance of this practice, we must differentiate between two categories of gift-exchange in ancient Greece: (1) gift-exchange that focused not on the gifts themselves, provided they represented a balanced exchange, but on their capacity to initiate or perpetuate a relationship (the type of gift-exchange often found in the Homeric world, which Hénaff in this volume calls “ceremonial gift-giving”);³⁵ and (2) gift-exchange that prioritized the acquisition

of the gifts over the relationship. In this second category it was more difficult to maintain the appearance of generosity. The language of honorific decrees and royal letters, which refer constantly to concepts such as “benefaction,” “generosity,” “goodwill,” and “gratitude,” reflects the efforts of poleis and kings to overcome this difficulty. The challenge existed particularly when the polis initiated the exchange with the aim of obtaining benefactions such as financial aid or political autonomy, and even more so when the intention was made clear in a letter with petitions that accompanied honors for the king.³⁶ To characterize a gift pursuing such advantages as a countergift, as a reward for allegedly fulfilled benefactions, was a way to disguise the real nature of the transaction.

Behind this strategy, however, was also an intent to “benefit” the recipient of false countergifts, by placing him in a position that would facilitate the exchange. This was most relevant in the case of a king, who had to be approached diplomatically.³⁷ The recipient of such gifts was more relaxed, because in exchanges that paid attention to the gifts rather than the relationship, the party who began the exchange was perceived as occupying a superior position hierarchically,³⁸ since the recipient remained indebted until he reciprocated; strategically, since the initiator of the exchange determined through his gift the minimum dimension of the countergift; and morally, since his gift, which ran the risk of being unreciprocated, was seen as more generous than the response, which was in principle merely compensation.³⁹ (Although the compensation might conceivably surpass the gift, this was difficult to prove, and the perception was that it simply cancelled a debt.) In addition, when the recipient was a king who cared about cultivating an image of benefactor to legitimize his position, to act as if some benefaction of his was being reciprocated rather than that he was receiving a gift was sensible policy. Finally, the act of introducing a gift as a countergift, while it implied a more comfortable position for the beneficiary, could oblige him in ways connected to how he reconciled the contradiction between image and reality. Precisely because the false countergift liberated the king from external pressure (*viz.*, from observers) to reciprocate, he experienced this gift internally as more generous than an open gift. At the same time, the pressure derived from the need to adjust reality to a discourse that portrayed him as a benefactor compelled him to reciprocate.

Final Remarks

The exercise of power through gifts in relationships between communities and individuals depended on the capacity to make gifts (or avoid them), as well as on the ability to manipulate public discourse by means of gifts whose existence was denied, or that were presented as countergifts or were simply invented. Pierre Bourdieu’s explanation of gift-exchange helps make sense of how this worked: “No one is really unaware of the logic of exchange (it constantly surfaces in explicit form, when for example someone wonders whether a present will be judged sufficient), but no one fails to comply with the rule of the game which is to act as

if one did not know the rule. We might coin the term “common miscognition” to designate this game in which everyone knows – and does not want to know – that everyone knows – and does not want to know – the true nature of the exchange” (Bourdieu 1997: 232). All of this involved the intentions of the actors – or at least of some of them. But what can we say about the conditions that helped shape public discourse in a way that could depart so far from reality?

Some of these conditions have been suggested above. In the classical period, the fact that all citizens were not expected to contribute equally to the community, and that the amount depended on one’s means and possibilities, led to ambiguities and gave the demos room to present some donations by members of the elite as contributions due the polis. In the Hellenistic period, the circumstance that the image of benefactor became part of the identity of kings facilitated the characterization of certain honors as rewards for virtual benefactions. In addition, gift-exchange often consisted not just of two acts (giving and countergiving) but of a sequence of gifts and counter gifts between actors (e.g., polis and king) in a ongoing relationship. The act of reciprocating could be used to make the other indebted with an official counter gift that, because of its disproportionate value, was more of a gift than a form of compensation. And in a chain of gifts and counter gifts the distinction between the categories could become unclear. After reciprocating, one might easily make a new gift while presenting it as a counter gift.

The vocabulary of gift-exchange between individuals and communities is also significant. The designation of both gifts and rewards as *dōreai* indicates that, although the Greeks distinguished between the two types (as is apparent from honorific decrees), they saw them as *essentially* identical: these were all “gifts” and thus in one sense interchangeable. Last but not least, we must consider again the principle with which this paper began, and which lies at the core of Mauss’s theory: the importance of reciprocity, the fact that gifts implied counter gifts to such an extent that they were almost two sides of the same coin, allowed gifts to be rewarded even before the giving had taken place; the outcome would always be the same – a gift and a reward – regardless of the order of occurrence.

Notes

- 1 These are common definitions in political and social theory. See for example Dahl 1963: 40; Runciman 1989: 3–4; Dowding 1996: 4–7; Porter, Angle, and Allen 2003: 3–4; Imbeau 2007: 172–81.
- 2 E.g. *Il.* 6.219–20; *Od.* 21.31–35; 24.283–86; Hes. *Op.* 349–55; [Epicharm.] fr. 211 Kassel-Austin; Hdt. 1.41, 69–70; 3.139–40; Thuc. 1.137; 2.40.4; Xen. *Cyr.* 5.3.31, 4.32; 8.17–20; *Ap.* 16; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1167A14–16; [Arist.] *Rh. Al.* 1446B36–7; Dem. 20.64; *Syll.*³ 317; 354; 374; 401; 493; *OGIS* 10, 267 II, 339, 763. (Abbreviations here and elsewhere in this chapter conform to those of the Oxford Classical Dictionary.)
- 3 These are all controversial questions that cannot be treated in the paper. The work of philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida already gives an idea of how different the answers to them can be (see Levinas 1969 and Derrida 1992).

- 4 The Greeks took many different aspects into consideration when they assessed the degree of equivalence of gifts in gift-exchange: the material and symbolic value of the objects, the time that separated gifts from counter gifts, the wealth and status of the actors involved, preexisting debts, and so on. See for instance *Il.* 7.287–305 (cf. Donlan 1989: 10–11 and Postlethwaite 1998: 94); Xen. *An.* 7. 3. 20; Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1243A15–17. See also Duplouy 2006: 174ff., 181; Allan and Cairns 2011: 123.
- 5 E.g. Hyp. 5.25; Dem. 19.273; Din. 2.7. Cf. Domingo Gygax 2003: 187–189.
- 6 Even in cases in which it is awarded by the state, e.g., at Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.8.
- 7 Ehrenberg 1957–58: 1:64; Kolb 1984: 122; Meier 1986: 25ff.; Stahl 1987: 129; Stein-Hölkeskamp 1989: 213; Morgan 1990: 5; Veyne 1990: 72–77; Walter 1993: 82; R. Parker 1996: 27; Currie 2011: 278–79.
- 8 Donlan 1973: 145ff.; Ober 1989: 55, 199; Hall 2007: 193–194; 231; V. Parker 2007: 33; Gehrke 2009: 409; Morris 2009: 73–75; Wallace 2009: 411, 412, 416, 419; Rose 2009.
- 9 On the wealth of tyrants: Solon fr. 33. 5–6 West²; Pl. *Menex.* 90a; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1120B24–27; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 27. 3. On confiscation of property by tyrants: Hdt. 5.92; [Arist.] *Oec.* 1346B7–9; Diod. Sic. 12. 9. 2ff.; Berve 1967: 1:53; 2:548; Brandt 1989: 213–14. On resources from military campaigns: Paus. 2.9.6; de Libero 1996: 404.
- 10 On help for peasants: [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 16.2, 9. On construction projects: Thuc. 2.15; 6.54.6–7.5; Arist. *Pol.* 1313B23; Paus. 1.14.1, 19.1; *IG I³* 948; de Libero 1996: 98–9, 103–6; V. Parker 2007: 34–35; Hall 2007: 140–41. On the Panathenaia: Thuc. 6.56ff.; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 18.2–3; Stahl 1987: 246ff.; Stein-Hölkeskamp 1989: 150, V. Parker 2007: 35.
- 11 Bacchyl. 3.10–21 (trans. Campbell); Pind. *Pyth.* 1.89–90 (trans. Race). See also Bacchyl. 3.63–66; Pind. *Ol.* 2.92–95; *Pyth.* 2.58–86.
- 12 Plut. *Per.* 14.1–2. The assumption that the anecdote derives from historical events is based on the so-called springhouse decree (*IG I³* 49). See Stadter 1989: 181–82.
- 13 Hdt. 7.139; Thuc. 1.73.1–2; 5.89; 6.82.1, 83.1; Isoc. 4.67ff.
- 14 Thuc. 2.40.4 (trans. Smith). On the interpretation of this passage, see Missiou 1998: 190–91; Herman 1998: 210.
- 15 Lauffer 1974: 147; Ostwald 1995: 373, 374, 378; Wilson 2000: 13–15.
- 16 [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 27.2–3. On donations in his deme, see also *Ath.* 12.533a–c (citing Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 89); Cic. *Off.* 2. 64 (citing Theophr. fr. 515); Nep. 5.4; Plut. *Cim.* 10; *Per.* 9. On his donations for construction projects: Plut. *Cim.* 13.7–8; Judeich 1931: 73–74, 314, 352.
- 17 On Nicias: Pl. *Grg.* 472a; Plut. *Nic.* 3.2–5. On Alcibiades: Thuc. 6.12.2, 16.2–3; Isoc. 16.32, 35; Plut. *Alc.* 16.3. On the “politics of largesse,” see Connor 1971.
- 18 Herman 1998: 220. The reasons have been explained above: they are related to the reciprocity that governed the relationship between the members of the community and to the criteria used to evaluate the equilibrium of the reciprocal relationship. On the controversial topic of civic obligations in classical Athens, see Christ 2006; Herman 2006; Liddel 2007.
- 19 On the Athenian discourse about the legitimacy of extracting money from the rich, see Ober 1989: 199–205, with many quotations from the forensic literature. See also Dem. 14. 28.
- 20 This does not mean that oratory did not play an important role in fifth-century politics: see Mann 2007.

- 21 Dem. 18.112–13, 117–19, 299, 311; other sources on these contributions: Aeschin. 3. 17; Plut. *Mor.* 845f–845a.
- 22 For instance, Athens after the Lamian War (Diod. Sic. 18.18.4–5; Plut. *Phoc.* 28. 7) and under Demetrius of Phaleron (Diod. Sic. 18.74.3).
- 23 Hints of this are decrees in which the decisions are taken by the “polis” or “the polis and the magistrates” instead of “the demos” or “the council and the demos.” See, e.g., the following inscriptions from Lycia: Maiuri 1925–1926: 314–15; *TAM* II 262; Segre 1932: 446–48.
- 24 *IG* XII 1.762 (Lindos); Hauvette-Besnault 1883: 103–25 (Delos); *SGDI* 2521; 2524; *Syll.*³ 185 (Delphi).
- 25 That honorific decrees highlight this aspect is in the nature of such documents, just as it is in the nature of many fourth-century speeches to depict liturgies as services owed to the polis. What is symptomatic is the different kind of documents we have from fourth-century Athens, on the one hand, and the Hellenistic poleis, on the other.
- 26 *IG* XII.5. 129 (trans. Austin 2006: 128). Similar statements are frequent in Hellenistic honorific decrees, e.g., *TAM* II 160.
- 27 Gifts by the elite help explain why social conflicts were not more acute in the Hellenistic polis.
- 28 *SEG* II 663; *Syll.*³ 374; 493; *OGIS* 763; *IG* XII. 5.129; Bringmann and von Steuben 1995: no. 284 [E 1].
- 29 This is the reason why according to Polyb. 22.8 gifts by kings found opposition in the assembly of the Achaean League.
- 30 See Billows 1995: 73–80 (honors were desired by kings to promote their image as benefactors but simultaneously put them under pressure to respond in accord with this image); Domingo Gygax 2009: 170–78 (where the emphasis is on how honors made kings indebted).
- 31 Some of the most illustrative examples are discussed by Billows 1995: 75–77 (*OGIS* 222; 223; 227; Diod.Sic. 20.82.2–3); see also Domingo Gygax 2009: 175–78.
- 32 The best examples are the honors awarded Antigonos Monophthalmos by Rhodes (Diod. Sic. 20.82.2–3); see Billows 1995: 76.
- 33 For instance, Miletus obtained from Eumenes II a promise to finance the construction of a new gymnasium, and responded to the royal pledge by establishing a cult and a festival in honor of the king so as to compel him to fulfill his promise (Bringmann and von Steuben 1995: no. 284 [E 1]).
- 34 These countergifts in advance are what I have elsewhere defined as “proleptic honors”: Domingo Gygax 2009: 163–91.
- 35 At *Od.* 21.31–35, for example, we are told that “Iphitus met Odysseus, and gave him the bow, which of old great Eurytus carried, and had left at his death to his son in his lofty house. And to Iphitus Odysseus gave a sharp sword and a stout spear, *as the beginning of a loving friendship*” (trans. Murray/Dimock).
- 36 The document from Xanthus cited above (*SEG* xxxvi. 1218) is a good example.
- 37 The opposite tactic, based on social pressure or even threats, was also an effective means to obtain gifts, but in other contexts, such as the relationship between the demos and the elite in fourth-century Athens discussed above.
- 38 By contrast, in the exchanges of the first type, receiving gifts could be a way of showing that one had many friends.
- 39 Thuc. 2.40.4 (quoted above) reflects this view very well: “when he repays the kindness it will count, not as a favor bestowed, but as a debt repaid.”

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Further Reading

On Greek reciprocity, see Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford 1998. On the relationship between archaic elite and demos, Duplouy 2006, Hall 2007: 119–144, and Morris 2009: 70–77. Archaic tyranny is a topic of ongoing debate between scholars who understand archaic tyranny essentially as the result of an intra-elite struggle (de Libero 1996) and those who emphasize the role of the demos (V. Parker 2007; Wallace 2009). On the relationship between Athenian elite and demos in the fifth century, see Mann 2007; in the fourth century, Ober 1989 and Christ 2006. On the interaction between city-states and Hellenistic kings, see Billows 1995: 56–80, and Ma 1999; on Hellenistic euergetism, Gauthier 1985 and Domingo Gygax 2009. Valuable sources in translation – including many inscriptions – dealing with gifts to Hellenistic city-states can be found in Austin 2006.

Fictive Giftship and Fictive Friendship in Greco-Roman Society

ZEBA CROOK

If friends make gifts, gifts make friends.
Marshall Sahlins

Mauss's Gifting

Marcel Mauss's influence on the scholarship of exchange, gifting, and reciprocity vastly outstrips his rather meager offerings on the topic – a brief book of just over 33,000 words in the French original (Mauss 1990). Yet, Mauss forever changed the way anthropologists would approach exchange, shaping the perspectives of figures as consequential as Bronislaw Malinowski, Meyer Fortes, Margaret Read, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marshall Sahlins, and Karl Polanyi, to name but a few. Mauss's influence derives primarily from two points found in his brief *Essai sur le don*: first, that gifts inaugurate and perpetuate relationships, they are not merely legal and are in no way commercial; and second, that the compulsion toward reciprocity is as universal as it is visceral.

It is surprising that Mauss never defines what he means by “gift,” and yet he claims to draw a near-universal portrait of gifting from cultures worlds apart in time and space. In all, his portrait of gifting was drawn from secondhand ethnographic observations concerning Melanesian and Andaman Island, and Native American Northwest Coast, aboriginal cultures, and to a lesser extent ancient Roman, Hindu, and Germanic legal or literary texts. One is forced to conclude that the meaning of “gift” was self-evident for Mauss, and, in point of fact, Mauss's presumed definition stands out on practically every page of his essay: a gift is something positive, traditional, moral, healthy, beneficial, pleasant, binding, and

constructive. When gifts are exchanged between people/parties, the comparative status of the exchanging parties appears to be irrelevant, which is to say gifts bring people together, they transcend differences in wealth, power, and status. Further, gift-exchange is an older, friendlier, and more ethical form of the modern commercial exchange, which is in Mauss's estimation colder and more calculating (Mauss 1990: 61). Gift-exchange thus functions romantically in Mauss's world-view: those were happier, simpler times, when people worked cooperatively for the greater good, and a united society was the result. I shall not deny that gifts can have this effect, but the overall focus is entirely too irenic.

Although Mauss's primary focus in his essay was on gifts, his primary *interest* was in the close relationships that derive from gifting. For Mauss, to refuse a gift "is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (17). In other words, it is a refusal of friendship, for gift-exchange ignores status difference, since gift-exchange appears to create a society of equals. Marshall Sahlins encapsulated Mauss's emphasis on the social nature of exchange in this way, and I do not think he misinterpreted Mauss: "If friends make gifts, gifts make friends" (Sahlins 1972: 186). For Mauss, as well as for the litany of influential scholars he influenced, gifts are both the raw materials that create civilized societies and the bond that keeps them from disintegrating. One imagines that Mauss cannot conceive of conditions in which one might justifiably wish to reject a gift. To reject a gift must be the apex of misanthropy.

In contrast to market exchange (and by extension modern capitalism), Mauss's term "total prestations" refers not to the immediate exchange of goods for wealth, but rather the eventual (generalized) exchange of "banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs" (Mauss 1990: 7). Mauss argues that among the Maori, for instance, there is a belief that failure of reciprocity results in poor health (14). Gifts in the form of alms help the poor (22–23). In the Andaman Islands, gifting produces "friendly feelings between the two persons in question," and they "put the seal upon marriage and form a link of kinship between the two pairs of parents" (25). In the Trobriand Islands, chiefs, acting on behalf of their people, practically seduce another chief who they perceive to be wealthy in resources. The exchange of gifts between the two chiefs "establishes a kind of clan link between the partners" and ensures the survival and protection of both groups (36). Again, in the Trobriand Islands farmers leave produce at the doors of fishermen, and fishermen leave fish at the doors of farmers (38). Their division of labor and reception of gifts that derive from the labor of the other benefit both families. Melanesians as a whole enjoy a wide and bustling trade economy, but it is not based on sale and purchase but on gifting and reciprocation (41). Examples of the positive, constructive, even friendly nature of gifting abound throughout the remainder of the book.

Not even Mauss's treatment of the more agonistic practice of potlatch contradicts my assessment of his romantic view of gift. Found only among Northwest Coast aboriginal tribes (e.g., Kwakiutl, Haida, and Tlingit), this practice can be violent, is often antagonistic, and is always competitive (45). These groups exchange gifts in order to win prestige and inscribe superiority over one another (47). Not surprisingly,

Mauss calls the potlatch the “monstrous product of the system of presents” (54). Two aspects of this statement are worth highlighting. First, it further illustrates the rose-colored lenses through which Mauss looks at gifting. Anything less than total prestations is a “monstrous product.” Second, even the negative aspects of the practice of gift-exchange do not lead Mauss to set potlatch outside “gift-exchange.” A possible, though admittedly conjectural, explanation for this resides in the fact that there is a positive element to the suppressed violence of the potlatch: these exchanges steer people away from open war and conflict. In other words, the potlatch becomes a form of exchange that circumvents actual fighting by ritualizing violence under gift-exchange. These people are not fighting over limited resources; they are exchanging gifts.

At the end of my reading of *The Gift*, I wondered whether Mauss could imagine a situation in which a gift was not positive, say as an act of aggression, or of social control, or the influence of power. Could Mauss imagine no instances in which one might wish to refuse a gift, and by extension “friendship”? One limitation in Mauss’s work is his overly expansive cross-cultural model of exchange. While I hold in great esteem his exploration of reciprocity and the social nature of exchange, the overwhelmingly positive and irenic assumptions about gifting are not as universal as he claimed. The conclusions that Mauss draws concerning gifting derive from societies in which there is little (if any) social stratification (or at least this is how Mauss represents Melanesian, Andaman, and Northwest Coast aboriginal societies), and the universality of these conclusions is challenged by societies in which social stratification (and popular awareness of this stratification) is paramount to social interaction and material exchange, particularly Greco-Roman societies. There are times, as Pierre Bourdieu shows (1977: 4–8), when a gift is not really a gift, when ambiguous behaviors and social realities render gifting much more complex than Mauss seems to have allowed (see also Hénaff in this volume).

Mauss in a Greco-Roman Setting

Mauss’s depiction of gifting as overwhelmingly positive, socially constructive, and egalitarian becomes problematic in a Greco-Roman context, where society is profoundly socially stratified, agonistic, and shot through with the importance of gaining honor and avoiding the loss of honor (see Peristiany 1966; Gilmore 1987; Horden and Purcell 2000; Barton 2001; Greverus, Römhild, and Welz 2001). Let one example of Mauss’s problematic influence suffice. This from Paul Veyne’s *Bread and Circuses* (Veyne 1990: 5–6).

Every class of the population benefited from gifts. The poor received them as charity, or in the capacity of clients, or in that of free citizens. The slaves received them as a result of philanthropy or paternalism. The peasants, sharecroppers on the states of the rich, were forgiven their arrears of dues ... so long as they did not leave their master, this being, for landowners, a way of keeping tenants dependent upon them. Advocates, so long as their occupation was not recognized as a profession and they were forbidden

to demand payment, received gifts from their clients as honorariums. ... Corporations also received gifts. From the beginning of the Imperial period, making gifts to the Roman state was a privilege reserved of the Emperor alone. But the cities and municipalities of the Empire received gifts from the state nobility (the senatorial order), the regional nobility (the equestrian order), the notables who made up the municipal nobility (the order of decurians) and the rich freedmen The provinces of the Empire likewise received gifts, in a particular way.

Clearly for Veyne, a “gift” is anything that passes from one entity to another, regardless of other concerns, such as the relative status of the two parties, the relationship between them, and the ability – or advisability – of one to repay the other. In very telling language, Veyne comments that the Hellenistic world looked “like a society of *‘friends’* and citizens” (1990: 9). He draws one interesting example of a gift from Polybius: Attalus of Pergamum fortified a fortress of the Aetolians and later the Aetolians supported Attalus in resisting Philip of Macedon. Veyne thus understands the purpose of Attalus’s benefaction to have been the maintenance of useful political alliances. But he does not mention that this is also patron–client behavior. The issue here is of primary cause versus secondary result: Was maintaining useful political relations the cause or the result of the benefaction? In Veyne’s very functionalist and irenic perspective (like that of Mauss), it can only be the latter.¹ But to receive a benefaction is to be obligated to someone, which is not always a good thing.

To anticipate what follows, it was common knowledge that some people *and* states did not wish to be under any obligation, to be dependent or subordinate to others.² That Veyne does not see this is surprising when he notes that “the Achaeans were unwilling to accept gifts from certain kings” (1990: 103). Of course they were; if accepting gifts put one in a position of being a dependent, a client, and having to follow certain customs of honor and obligation toward a patron nation or king, then it is fully understandable that some would be wary of entering into such a relationship.

At the greatest level of abstraction, there is no problem with using categories such as friendship and giftship expansively, with letting them apply across as broad a range of exchanges and relationships as possible. The problem, as illustrated in the quotation from Veyne, arises when one becomes interested in *actual* social relationships and social dynamics between exchanging parties, not just in the general tenor of exchange, as it was for Mauss. This is the point at which precision becomes desirable, and in this case it is precision concerning gifting and friendship in an ancient Greco-Roman setting that I seek.³ The driving questions, then, in what follows are two: When is a gift not really a gift? and Who can be friends?

Searching for Clarity

Marshall Sahlins (influenced by Mauss) was one of the first to aspire to map exchange more accurately by distinguishing three types of exchange: generalized, balanced, and negative. The first is situated within the larger kinship unit, is selfless and open-ended, and can withstand a long period before reciprocation happens. He

offered as examples a mother's breast-feeding and food-sharing among family members. Balanced reciprocity moves us further from the kinship center, and thus is more prone to self-interest. As the name suggests, this type of exchange requires balance in what is exchanged, and thus includes gift-exchange, trades, buying and selling, and marriage contracts. Negative reciprocity moves us even further from the kinship center, and is the least intimate, or positive. Negative reciprocity threatens social stability because it tries to get something for nothing. Sahlins included bartering, stealing, and raiding in this group. Two features are useful in this typology: One is the recognition that exchanges that occur within kinship units are different from other types of exchange, for instance, that breast-feeding is not a gift one makes to one's child; and second, that gift-exchange is a balanced form of exchange.

Nonetheless, the cross-cultural applicability of Sahlins's model is limited by two things. First, the societies that were his focus were fairly egalitarian societies, in that they appear to have had little awareness of (or concern with) status difference.⁴ Second, Sahlins's model of exchange measures all forms of exchange based on their social distance from the kinship center: the purest form of exchange is that between mother and child, since it is selfless, and exchange becomes increasingly selfish (and negative) from there. This might be fair for a society in which the principal social institution is kinship, but that does not describe Greco-Roman society and thus some modifications have been made in order to fit the model better to Greco-Roman society.⁵

This can be accomplished by recognizing that in the Greco-Roman world, kinship is not the central, binding institution that it is in the societies on which Mauss and Sahlins focused. In a society where kinship is central, everything is measured according to its proximity to the family, or *social distance*, as we saw with Sahlins's types of reciprocity. In the hyper-status-conscious Greco-Roman world, on the other hand, *status distance* replaces social distance. It is not at all the case that kinship is unimportant in Greco-Roman cultures. This caveat cannot be overemphasized. It is not that kinship is irrelevant in Greco-Roman social structure, but rather that it is not the central institution it is in other societies. Status in the Greco-Roman world, for instance, is not derived singularly from kinship (as it appears to be in Mauss's and Sahlins's societies), but is derived from considerations of gender, education, ethnicity, wealth, power, and freedom (or the lack of it), in addition to kinship.

For the Greco-Roman world, a model of exchange based on status distance works better than one based on social distance.⁶ It looks like this:

Greco-Roman Model of Exchange

Familial reciprocity accounts for exchanges that occur within the family, broadly defined. It recognizes, as Sahlins rightly did, that familial exchange is different from extrafamilial exchange and needs therefore to be set apart. Breast-feeding is many things, but surely it is not a gift.

Symmetrical reciprocity refers to exchanges in which there is symmetry of the status (of those doing the exchanging) *and* symmetry of value (of what is being exchanged). When the value of what is exchanged ceases to be symmetrical or balanced, the relationship breaks down. Hence, we find here, among other things, gift-exchange, but also market exchange. Now this requires some explanation. It is not the case that gift-exchange and market exchange are indistinguishable, but simply that they are both to some extent symmetrical. In market exchange, it may not be that the relative status of buyer and seller is technically symmetrical, but rather that the relative status of the two does not (or should not) affect the transaction. When status intervenes in market exchange, then clearly the laws of market exchange have been usurped. There is definite symmetry in the market exchange itself, since the seller (with the help perhaps of market conditions) has decided on the value of a good, and the buyer pays it. But consider the following hypothetical scenario: an elite leader enters a shop, and the shop owner gives him anything he wants for free. Clearly, the relationship has now become one of patronage and clientage; it is no longer a market exchange, despite occurring there. So the very point at which status intervenes in market exchange is the point at which market exchange ceases to be symmetrical. Thus, market exchange is symmetrical on value, and somewhat symmetrical on status. The exchange of gifts conversely refers to exchanges between status equals with the ability to reciprocate with something equally valuable (value equality).

Asymmetrical reciprocity refers to exchanges that occur between parties of unequal status involving exchanges of unequal value. Reciprocation is not made *in kind*, for if it were, it would become gift-exchange (e.g., symmetrical). Counted here are exchanges of patronage and benefaction, because the parties involved are not status equals, and because what they exchange is not of equal value (let alone equivalent kind). Asymmetrical exchanges, like symmetrical exchanges, can result in a powerful social dynamic, often resembling friendship, and equally often cast in the language of friendship; but as we shall see below, friendship is as much part of the domain of symmetrical exchange as is giftship.

Negative reciprocity refers to exchanges in which one party attempts to get more and give up less: bartering and cheating. I am less inclined than I once was to include stealing here (Crook 2006: 91). Stealing is redistributive, but it is not really a form of exchange. In bartering or cheating, both parties come away with something, even if one comes away with less than would be ideal.

In a Greco-Roman context, the exchange of gifts and the exchange of benefits (including acts of patronage and benefaction) fall into two different types of exchange. The first is symmetrical, the second is not; and the two are, it must be stressed, mutually exclusive. When exchanges become asymmetrical, they cease to be gifting and likely become patronage or euergetism.

Figure 5.1 maps out what the ancient sources reveal, supplemented by anthropological theory, namely, that status and relative value govern whether what is exchanged is a gift

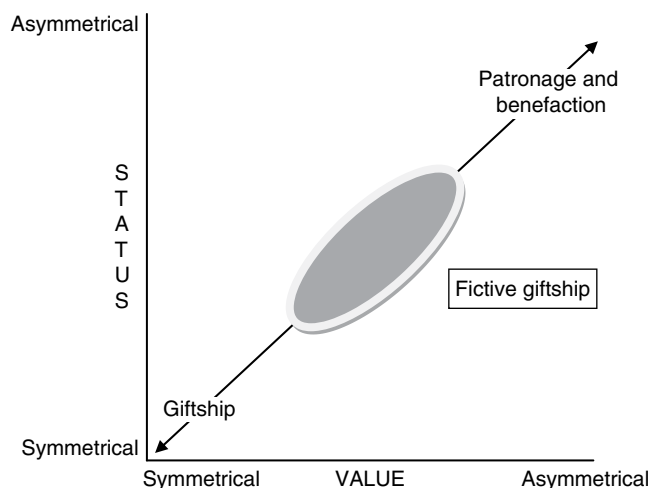


Figure 5.1 Model 1: Giftship

or a benefaction. In order to be a gift, both value and status must be symmetrical. When a benefaction is repaid in full, it is no longer a benefaction, something that is possible only in theory, not practice, and is in any case inadvisable according to Pliny (*Epistles* 10.51). A gift, therefore, within a Greco-Roman context, is something exchanged between people with equal status *and* reciprocated with something of equal value. To illustrate: How does a new governor repay the emperor for his patronage appointment? Even a governor, elite though he is, lacks the status, power, and resources to give the emperor anything he does not already have or have access to. How does a poet repay the one who supports his poetic endeavors financially and secures him an audience? If the poet could do the same for his patron (symmetrical reciprocity), he would not have needed a patron in the first place.

So, the answer to the first of our guiding questions, “When is a gift not really a gift?” is “When it is a fictive gift,” meaning that the gift might be cloaked in the language of equality and generosity, but it is in reality intended to exercise power over another. A relationship of patronage can often be inaugurated when a wealthy person “offers” something (an object or a service) to someone lacking the resources (material or otherwise) to attain it alone. A gift is not a gift when status and value, or the inability to repay, impose themselves upon the exchange.

To say that gift-exchange and patronage – symmetrical and asymmetrical reciprocities – are mutually exclusive is not to deny that they are easily confused. In both instances, giftship and patronage/euergetism, things are exchanged; gratitude, reciprocity, respect, honor, and so on, are all expected; a long-standing relationship is expected, as is goodwill. But gifting and patronage are not the same thing, nor are friendship and patronage. Ultimately, however, the reason gifting and patronage are so easily confused in the Greek and Roman period is the culturally peculiar practice of the Greeks and Romans of using friendship language to give asymmetrical relationships and exchanges the *appearance* of symmetry.

Receiving an act of patronage obligated one to broadcast one's dependence on a superior, and by extension to broadcast one's lower relative status. Because of this, both Greeks and Romans appropriated the language of friendship – *philos* in Greek, *amicitia* in Latin – in order to mask relationships of dependence or inequality. One *never* finds patrons referring to fellow elite clients *as* clients; they are always referred to as “friends” (more on this below). There is a difference of opinion on how to interpret this. David Konstan (1997) has argued that the language of friendship is used because friendship describes the relationships in question. Konstan argues that they knew the difference between friendship and clientage, so we should trust them to so distinguish. While I agree with Konstan that ancient people knew the difference between clients and friends, I am inclined to follow those who argue that the friendship language is a “coyness” and “dressing up” of status and exchange inequalities (Saller 1982; Saller 1989; Smith 2003).⁷ I like to think that attention to status and exchange equality (in the form of a culturally appropriate model of exchange) can contribute to this interesting debate.

Gifting versus Patronage

All gifts obligate, but a gift from a social superior obligates in a way that inscribes the inequality, inferiority, of the person with the lower status, whereas gifts exchanged between status equals – friends – obligates positively and inscribes their equality. The best way to illustrate the difference is to attend to the stigma many knew of relationships of dependence. Cicero claims that wealthy people were loath to be put under an obligation of any kind: “It is bitter as death to them to have accepted a patron or to be called clients” (*Off.* 2.69). The people Cicero imagines in this position would have been elite. The plebs were surely accustomed to being called much worse, and were in any case too reliant to be so concerned with perceptions.

Seneca expresses something similar. “There are some who are not willing to receive a benefit unless it is privately bestowed” (*Ben.* 2.23.1). Others accept, but try to give their thanks privately, quietly, and away from the crowds. Seneca charges these people with repudiation and ingratitude (2.23.2), an exceedingly serious social ill according to Seneca: “Homicides, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, robbers, sacrilegious men, and traitors there always will be; but worse than all these is the crime of ingratitude” (*Ben.* 1.10.4). In trying to avoid the odious reputation of being a client (*clientium*), they end up with a far worse reputation: that they are ingrates (2.23.3). On the stigma of receiving of benefits, Seneca (*Brev. vit.*) laments – while discussing another topic – the condition of those who are engrossed in other people's business, whose sleeping and waking, the pace of their walk, and who they like and dislike, are dictated by another (*Brev. vit.* 19.3). Clients, in other words, are no better off than slaves.

Summarizing his contribution to this topic, Paul Millett suggests that the reason one might wish not to become dependent on a social superior has to do with a

concern over slavishness, a concern that goes back to Aristotle. The person of lower status in an unequal relationship “is forced to compromise his *eleutheria* [“autonomy”] by adapting his behavior to gratify his potential benefactor, on whose favors he is dependent” (Millett 1989: 33). The stigma associated with relationships of dependence, and the reception of benefactions as opposed to the reception of gifts, is evident in another Greco-Roman practice: the use of friendship language to mask relationships of dependence.

Friendship versus Fictive Friendship

Friendship in Greco-Roman antiquity is addressed in a surprisingly wide array of sources: philosophical, rhetorical, and historical writings, personal and professional letters, romances, dramatic as well as comedic plays, educational progymnasmata [“rhetorical exercises”], inscriptions, graffiti, and papyri. One can cull from these sources over time that friendship rested on five pillars: *isotēs* (equality), *charis* (reciprocity), *koinōnia* (unity), *eunomia* (goodwill), and *parvësia* (frankness). The terms may be Greek, but they reflect Roman understandings of friendship no less for that (Brunt 1965: 3; see also Konstan 1997: 122).

The base of ancient friendship is equality (*isotēs*). Equality of status is required for there to be true friendship, for otherwise two people cannot share the same worldview. It was ridiculous to imagine friendship between people of unequal status, as if a father and his child could be *friends*, regardless of the love shared between them (Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 7.4.2; see also Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1157B; 1159B; *Eth. Eud.* 1239A; 1242A.). It is not, of course, that people in these roles cannot feel affection or love for one another; the issue is whether they can be friends. We should not mistake affection (or loyalty for that matter) for friendship. Friendship requires more than affection, loyalty, and even reciprocity. Friendship requires above all equality of social status.

From equality derives reciprocity (*charis*), for equality of means is required in order to be able to reciprocate a gift in kind. Friends, of course, honor one another and show gratitude, but these are not the articles of reciprocation (as you find in relationships of dependence); they are the products of *isotēs* and *koinōnia*. But without reciprocity there can be no friendship.⁸ Friends share all things, and can always count on all things – from emotional connection to practical gifts – being reciprocated. In classical Greek sources, the most persistent anxiety concerning friendship derives from the dependability of one’s friends. Would they help you in times of need, or would they be fair-weather friends? But as David Konstan shows, it is important to recognize that “the *philia* or love that obtains among *philoî* has its source in the benefits that they are in a position to confer upon one another, but it is not reducible to such services” (Konstan 1988: 286). Friendship, it is true, is more than reciprocity, but it is nothing without it. And the importance of reciprocity does not wane in the Hellenistic period, despite the claim of Konstan (together with many others) that unequal friendships become the surprising norm.

True friends not only share *isotēs*, they are also united; they are one. Friends are another self, like you in every important way, of one mind (Cicero *Amic.* 4.15; Plutarch *De amic. mult.* 96e–f; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 4.42). Aristotle calls this *koinōnia* – a shared life of shared activities with a shared purpose: “all *philia* consists of *koinōnia*” (*Eth. Nic.* 8.12.1). Obviously, then, friendships make one vulnerable, and many bemoaned the disloyal friend, the insincere friend, failed friendships. Therefore, we can add loyalty and sincerity as characteristics of *koinōnia*.

Goodwill, *eunoia* (which Cicero renders *benevolentia*), is a necessary component of every friendship, but sadly so too is it the start of every failed friendship. It is, in other words, a necessary component of every relationship – character, utility, and pleasure alike – but it is no predictor of longevity. Goodwill wishes nothing more than the good in others. It pertains to esteem, respect; it seeks out and celebrates the success of the other. It suffers when friends suffer, and is not threatened by someone’s good fortune. And of course it cannot be any other way; since friends are “one soul,” one cannot be jealous of the other’s successes, nor secretly happy about his failures. But this does raise a challenge. Ancient writers – such as Dionysius of Halicarnasus in his *Roman Antiquities* – acknowledge that jealousy at someone’s success is perfectly natural, and thus friendships between people (or parties) of unequal social status, power, or wealth are almost certain to fail.⁹

Because of the vulnerability of friendship, many writers were concerned with telling the difference between real friends and others. The best test, according to Plutarch, was frank speech (*parrēsia*). A true friend would be willing to incur the wrath of a friend in order to be honest, for it would suggest you were putting their best interests (*eunoia*) above even the friendship. The opposite of the true friend is the flatterer, who speaks only to please a superior. This fact can also be approached from another direction. *Parrēsia* denotes the true friend not only because he or she has the selfless dedication to speak freely, but also because that person has the *ability* to speak freely. A slave, a client king, and so on, do not have the ability (the freedom) to speak freely.

These five characteristics of ancient friendship derive from the collectivistic nature of their culture. The focus is appropriately on human interaction and engagement (dyadism). This is significant for what is missing, namely, emotion and affection, the focus on which is more consistent with individualistic cultures. It is unnecessary and irresponsible to claim that ancient friendships were devoid of emotion or affection; the key point here is that emotion and affection are not defining characteristics of ancient friendship. They are rather sometimes a feature of friendship.

My immediate interest here is to distinguish between fictive friendship and, for lack of a better phrase, *real* friendship. In the interest of brevity, let us look at two examples. I have chosen one Greek and the other Roman, and from different periods, with the hope that these two examples will illustrate that we are dealing here with widespread cultural practices, not the idiosyncrasies of specific times and localities.

Xenophon (Greek, fourth century BCE) relates a conversation (*Mem.* 2.9) in which Socrates advises Criton on how to escape the clutches of people who keep trying to blackmail him: blackmail them back. Socrates asks, “Why not keep a man” around to act as a dog guarding the sheep? When Criton worries that even

this man would turn on him, Socrates assures him there are many men in the city who would be honored to be a *philos* to Criton (*Mem.* 2.9.3). Given the context, clearly Xenophon's Socrates is not imagining someone of equal social station to Criton, so he cannot be suggesting the two will be close friends. He is suggesting using one of Criton's clients to do some dirty work. Proving this point, Criton settles on Archdemus, an eloquent but poor man. Archdemus is so good at persuading people to drop their actions against Criton that soon Criton's *philoi*, in this case social equals, want to employ Archdemus too (*Mem.* 2.9.7).

Archdemus is not Criton's social equal; he is a client. In return for Archdemus's work, Criton gives him provisions from his crops, wine, and wool, and invites him to dinners. There is reciprocity, but not equality; and Socrates' use of *philos* earlier does not imply real friendship. Nor does Xenophon think so. He refers to Archdemus as Criton's dog from which the other shepherds (Criton's friends) want to benefit (*Mem.* 2.9.7). It is the stereotypical patron–client relationship, so, of course, Archdemus is eventually mocked by his peers; they call him *kolax* (“flatterer”; *Mem.* 2.9.8), because he does not have the freedom to speak his mind. Archdemus responds with the claim that it is better to have honest men like Criton and his friends as *philoi* than to be dishonest yourself. Xenophon closes with the observation that Archdemus came to be counted among Criton's *philoi*, but clearly the friendship is fictive, even allowing for Criton's deep appreciation of Archdemus's work.

A second example comes from Horace (Roman, first century CE), who warns Lollius away from seeking out a rich patron. Proper friendship requires the ability to speak freely (*parrësia*), which derives exclusively from social equality. Horace's advice to Lollius cannot be idiosyncratic: there is no freedom in unequal friendships. If your “friend” wishes to go hunting, you do not get to spend the afternoon writing poetry (*Ep.* 1.18.39–40); be careful about what you say, to whom you say it, and about whom it is said, because incriminating words always find a way of migrating back to a patron (*Ep.* 1.18.67–69); be extremely careful about who you introduce to the patron (*Ep.* 1.18.76–85). Horace even warns Lollius against seeking a relationship with a “great friend” at all: “Those who have never tried think it pleasant to court a friend in power; one who has tried dreads it” (*Ep.* 1.18.86–87; trans. Fairclough). This is not freedom, and it is therefore not true friendship. Where status equality is absent, there cannot be true friendship, for true friendship does not require extreme caution, which is surely the opposite of *parrësia*. The “friendship” is a fiction, and Horace knows it full well, probably from personal experience.¹⁰

Horace never once in this letter uses the words *patronus* or *cliens*; he uses *amicus* exclusively, and to describe both Lollius (*Ep.* 1.18.4, 101) and the would-be patron (*Ep.* 1.18.24, 44, 73, 86). It comes as some surprise then when the Loeb translator uses “patron” to translate a masculine demonstrative adjective (*illius* at *Ep.* 1.18.37). Of course, the person referred to *is* a patron, but Horace would never call him that, and the translation misses Horace's cultural sensitivity.

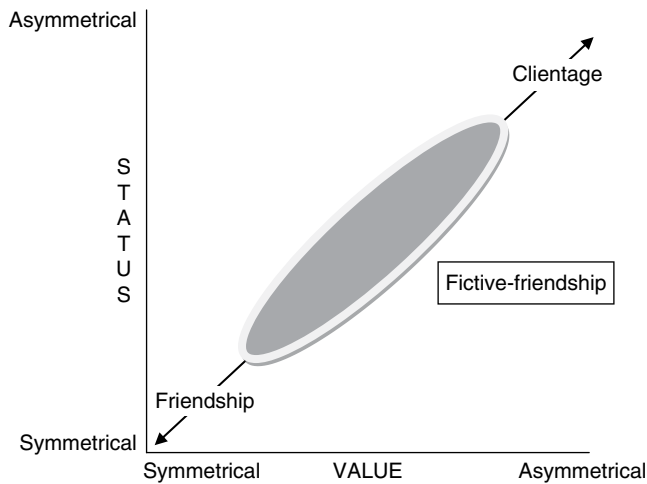


Figure 5.2 Model 2: Fictive Friendship

These two examples are illustrative. Both show that (1) the people in question distinguished quite attentively between kinds of friends and social status, but that (2) vocabulary tells us nothing about these distinctions. The language of friendship abounds, but only attention to the combination of status difference and obligation tells us that Archedemus and Criton share a fictive friendship, while Criton and the others who wished also to benefit from Archedemus's skill were proper friends. Likewise, I cannot imagine that either Horace or Lollius were under any illusion that "friendship" was really what Lollius was in search of. (See Figure 5.2.)

We can now answer the second of our guiding questions, Who can be friends? People involved in a relationship of dependence cannot *really* be friends, for there is neither equality of status nor equality of exchange.

A caveat on the term "fictive friendship" is in order here. First of all, the term is meant in the spirit of "fictive kinship," in that it is not meant pejoratively. I contend that, in keeping with the high degree of attention to honor and social stratification (e.g., rank and reputation), no one in antiquity was fooled by the use of friendship terminology in relationships of dependence. It is not meant to imply the absence of emotion, affection, and certainly not meant to imply that emotion and affection (where we have evidence of them in relationships of dependence) have been faked, that someone has been tricked. It is not a pessimistic term because it is not a comment on the affective aspect of friendship.

The term is a comment on the realities of ancient society and culture, but it also implies the recognition that emotion and affection are complex and culturally defined phenomena that are difficult to measure. Fictive friendship sits between friendship (defined by equality of status and means and *parrësia*, which ancient observers agree cannot really exist in relationships of dependence) and obvious clientship, which entails a wide gap in status. This is necessary because the use of

friendship language is not as prevalent in outright relationships of clientage as it is in relationships where there is near status equality, where drawing attention to difference in status is most odious. It is here that fictive friendship language is most common.

One might object that in the case of fictive kinship, kinship is easily defined: a collection of people is either a family, or it is, for example, a voluntary association. But that is not entirely true, nor entirely the point. If one is interested in mapping networking and actual social relationships, it can be no easier to distinguish real kin from fictive kin in these groups, since some members of an ancient voluntary association *could* be related. Nonetheless, we can still observe in these instances that the language of kinship has a function other than designating *actual* kinship. So too with the category of fictive friendship.

Another comment that ought to be made on the model (and this pertains equally to Model 1 and Model 2) concerns the gray area: it is not demarcated by a hard boundary. It is meant more to portray a zone in which at some point a relationship is no longer really a friendship but is morphing into a relationship of dependence, an unequal friendship, as some have been prone to call it, or a fictive friendship as I have called it.

Conclusion

As significant as Mauss's contributions are to our understanding of the gift and of reciprocity, they are too mired in more egalitarian societies to apply very usefully to the more socially stratified Greco-Roman world. In the status-conscious Greco-Roman world, the exchange of things became much more complex than it appears to have been in the societies on which Mauss focused. Sometimes, a gift is *not* really a gift, in that it is not socially constructive, positive, or pleasant. Some gifts do *not* make friends, *pace* Marshall Sahlins, and with Pierre Bourdieu. Sometimes what is given establishes or perpetuates a patron– or benefactor–client relationship. *That* is not a gift, except in the broadest and least useful sense. Sometimes the people involved in these exchanges call each other friend, but that friendship is a fiction designed to mask the fact of dependence. In the Greco-Roman world, status difference is the key to telling the difference between a gift and not-a-gift, between a friend and a fictive friend.

Notes

- 1 For a more sympathetic reading of Veyne, though in a different context, see Ilana F. Silber's chapter in this volume.
- 2 The chapter by Marcel Hénaff in this volume also touches on the role of obligation in some forms of gifting.
- 3 It goes without saying that by "Greco-Roman" I do not mean to imply that there were not cultural differences between Greek and Roman societies, nor that (Roman) patronage

and (Greek) benefaction or euergetism were precisely the same. Yet, while it is true that there are important distinctions to be drawn between patronage and benefaction, and between Greek and Roman cultural patterns, it is also true that each pair shares enough in common to justify, at a certain level of abstraction, counting them together (patronage and benefaction, Greco-Roman). On what unites patronage and benefaction, see Crook 2004: 59–66.

- 4 As was the practice of the day, Mauss and Sahlins refer to the societies on which they focus as “primitive” or archaic, defined by Sahlins as those “lacking a political state” (1972: 188). Aside from concerns over the problematic terminology, I have found that describing the societies is more helpful than labelling them.
- 5 Carney also felt that Sahlins’s simpler categories would have to be adapted to fit the more complex Greco-Roman society (see Carney 1973: 64).
- 6 What follows is my adaption of the Stegemann’s adaptation of Sahlins’s model. See Stegemann and Stegemann 1995: 34–37. This adaptation appeared first in Crook 2006.
- 7 I think the difference between the two positions is easily explained: Konstan is interested in the experience of friendship – and he is quite right that *feelings* of friendship could be found in unequal relationships – whereas others (myself included) are interested not in the experience of friendship but in the institution, which has requirements – such as equality and freedom (*parrēsia*) – that are not transcended or eradicated by emotion. Another reason to avoid using experience as a defining characteristic of friendship is that it is even more difficult to measure than status and exchange asymmetry.
- 8 Unlike the terms that follow – *isotēs*, *koinōnia*, *euonia*, *parrēsia* – *charis* is not a term used frequently by philosophers to designate “reciprocity.” Rather, they tend to discuss and describe reciprocity, but not to name it. But *charis* is a good term for us to use because it carries the dual sense of exchanges: the favor done or given, and the gratitude expressed for it.
- 9 See also Themistius *Orations* 274D–275A in the fourth century CE; citation from Konstan 1998: 290 n. 19.
- 10 My claim concerning the fluid but clear boundary between real friendship and fictive friendship is reflected in two works on Latin America. First, Romanucci-Ross (1973) writes about a Mexican village in which society is sharply vertically and hierarchically structured, much like the ancient Mediterranean world. She writes that “Friendship in the village is a horizontal relation – i.e., it exists among people are, roughly, peers on any given level. It does not (and, as far as we know, cannot) exist among people who are vertically much separated in status, because this would automatically produce a patronage relation” (74–75). Second, Wolf (1966), sees a spectrum that moves from emotional friendship to instrumental friendship through to patronage depending upon affection and on the degree of imbalance. Wolf also comments on the possibility of change: “what may start out as a symmetrical reciprocal relationship between equal parties may ... develop into a relation in which one of the parties ... develops a position of strength, and the other a position of weakness” (13). A final observation from Wolf: “When instrumental friendship reaches a maximum point of imbalance so that one partner is clearly superior to the other in his capacity to grant goods and services, we approach the critical point where friendships give way to the patron–client tie” (16). I draw attention to these only as interesting – and significant – parallels, not because they prove my point *per se*.

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Further Reading

I have long been interested in the topic of relationships and exchange. What is friendship in antiquity? What is patronage? We know both existed; the question is where do they intersect? How do we distinguish between them? Is it meaningful to distinguish between them? Did ancient people distinguish between them? I have a number of conversation partners in this paper. Ancient writers on friendship (Aristotle, Plutarch, Cicero) and patronage (Cicero, Seneca, Juvenal, Horace), as well as modern writers. No one knows more about ancient friendship than David Konstan (1998, 1997), and though we do not agree on every point in this paper, his work reminds me about the need to be aware of the human emotional component of friendships, even in unbalanced friendship. Paul Millet (1989) and Richard Saller (1989), in keeping with many ancient writers, such as Juvenal and Horace, show that patronage was to be avoided at times. In fact, the entire collection of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's essays (1989) is unparalleled in quality. On patronage, old works (Gilmore 1987 and Peristany 1966) are as indispensable as new ones (Greverus, Römhild, and Welz, 2001). And finally Mauss, though I believe he makes friendship overly, well, friendly(!), his thoughts on the necessity of reciprocity have changed how we all think about the dynamics of exchange. My gratitude to my many conversation partners.

Ovid Negotiates with His Mistress: Roman Reciprocity from Public to Private¹

NEIL COFFEE

As one critic has observed, the pervasive culture of gift-exchange in late republican and early imperial Rome seems more characteristic of a Polynesian than a Mediterranean society.² Consider the contrast between Rome and the two major contemporary Mediterranean societies best known to us. At Rome bequests to non-kin became so pervasive and problematic that they were legally restricted. Greek and Jewish societies had no such regulations. Roman gift practices were not only diffuse but also uniquely institutionalized. The patron–client relationship, predicated upon the exchange of gifts and favors between social superior and inferior, structured Roman economic, political, and social interactions like no institution in ancient Greek and Jewish cultures. Certain Greek practices, such as *euergetism*, were legally codified at Athens (Domingo Gygax 2003), but Greek culture generally favored reciprocal ties that were more flexible and less inherently durable. According to a recent book by Seth Schwartz, Jewish written sources down through the second century CE indicate that, prior to a gradual assimilation of Roman norms, gift culture was limited in Jewish society. Gift reciprocity was reserved for relations between God and Israel; charity took the place of dependent patronage; Jewish society was held together not by gift-exchange but by the solidarity of common ideals and identity; and there was consequently no strong ethical dichotomy between gift and commodity exchange types (Schwartz 2010: 167–68, 72–74).

The uniquely high level of institutionalization in Roman gift-giving naturally gave rise to serious reflection on the functioning of Rome's socioeconomic system. Cicero and Seneca both express the notion that Roman society is bound together by the exchange of gifts and favors.³ Cicero considered public and private generosity a cardinal virtue for noble Romans, and consequently for all of humanity. Seneca devotes his attention to the private sphere, since by his day the emperor

had taken over most forms of public benefaction. He concentrates in particular on the argument that givers should not resent ingratitude, but seek instead to understand its causes.⁴ Modern scholars have described the workings of the gift relationships that Cicero and Seneca took for granted, especially those between patron and client and elite friends, as well as the rhetorical moves used by the poets to redefine their relationships with benefactors (Saller 1982; Flaig 1993; Roller 2001 [patronage]; Verboven 2002 [friendship]; and Bowditch 2001 [literary representations of reciprocity]).

These ancient and modern discussions of Roman gift practices have focused on elite males whose reciprocal relationships have a clear political and economic function. Intimate relationships between Roman men and women stood apart from such public transactions but were nevertheless influenced by them. This chapter will argue that Romans rejected the intrusion of the instrumental, goal-directed gift-giving so common in the public sphere⁵ into affectionate relations between men and women. This rejection took the practical form of a legal ban on large gifts between husbands and wives. The first part of the chapter will demonstrate how the ban was motivated by concerns about the norms of public gift culture affecting married life. The second part will examine Ovid's *Am.* 1.10 as evidence for an ethic of communality in marriage that motivated the gift ban. Analysis of Ovid's poem will also help us to understand how rhetorical moves within a popular work of literature could have influenced Roman gift mores.

Ancient observers of Roman culture already fought against the tendency to view and employ gift transactions among male elites as payments by another name, with no true sense of generosity involved. Seneca advises his aptly named friend Liberalis to avoid reducing gift-giving to a matter of making loans at interest (*demus beneficia, non feneremus*, *Ben.* 1.1.9). Modern scholars have sought to better define the kind of gift practice Seneca wished to preserve and show that it was indeed a significant part of Roman culture. David Konstan has argued that Roman gift-exchange cannot be viewed simply as a matter of self-interested jockeying for advantage because there was a real emotional dimension to giving and receiving: "For the ancients, gratitude was a powerful and innate sentiment" (Konstan 2006: 164). It is instructive, however, that Konstan adduces several Greek examples supporting his claim, but only one from the Roman world.⁶ Other examples may exist, but their scarcity in Konstan's discussion is consistent with the absence of attention to the affective dimension of gift-exchange in the treatises of Cicero and Seneca. To be sure, the tendency of these elite sources to focus on the political arena and functional relationships among aristocrats likely distorts our view of actual Roman practices and experiences. But when we set the feverish pace of public gift-exchange against the slight evidence for an emotional dimension to gift-giving, we arrive at the picture of a society in which the frequent instrumental public use of gifts largely crowded out the expression of feelings of generosity in gift practice. This picture remains incomplete, however, until we look beyond the interactions between elite males.

The Household: Society without Gifts

Marshall Sahlins has written that the primary determinant of the mode of reciprocal exchange for a given interaction is the social distance between individuals or groups (Sahlins 1968, 1972).⁷ He posits three types of exchange on this spectrum: the negative reciprocity of harm given for harm between individuals or groups at the greatest social distance; the balanced reciprocity of *quid-pro-quo* exchange between nearer, nonhostile acquaintances; and generalized reciprocity of aid without explicit expectation of return. An example of the last would be a mother feeding a child: in a very close relationship of trust and physical intimacy, giving and receiving may happen, but without any regular, explicit reckoning. Generalized reciprocity can also be thought of simply as sharing or the communal use of resources.

We have no evidence of widespread strict and regular economic reckoning among Roman married couples and their children, but much evidence of the nurturing of children and interaction of husband and wife without such calculation. We can thus fairly assume that Sahlins's category of generalized reciprocity applies to the core members of the Roman household.⁸ Yet here we come upon a cultural oddity: Romans enforced a legal ban on gifts between husband and wife. Scholars have succeeded in reconstructing the main features of the law.⁹ It is thought to have been put into effect in the early first century BCE, and made legally invalid gifts between husband and wife and their agents or close relatives by marriage, the last presumably so that the core restriction on married couples could not be foiled. Small gifts on birthdays or at the Matronalia festival, which celebrated the role of the mother in a harmonious household, were permitted.¹⁰ As one might expect, the law seems to have been violated frequently, giving rise to the development of more elaborate distinctions between gift and nongift by jurists in an attempt to fit law to practice.

The activity of the jurists shows a perceived need to accommodate rather than eliminate the ban, suggesting that there was some collective will to keep it in place. Precisely why gifts between husband and wife were prohibited is not clear, however. In the *Digest* of Justinian, the jurist Ulpian remarks that the law was meant to prevent husband and wife from squandering their resources in extravagant gifts to each other.¹¹ That is, the law foresaw that an excess of emotion might lead to practical economic problems.¹² The scholar David Cherry, who examines the law and the reasons given for it in antiquity, accepts a version of this explanation that also relates to the danger of extravagant spending. He concludes that the most likely original purpose of the prohibition was to prevent a spending competition that would put wives' loyalties up for sale (Cherry 2002: 42). Perhaps demands by some wives that their husbands match the gifts of others would indeed have led to marital discord, or the habit of receiving large gifts would have induced wives to give and receive money and sexual favors outside their marriages. But it is equally possible that this explanation originates in the professional outlook of the jurists who advanced it, one that led them to look first for causes in the individual interests of Roman males who had legal standing in the courts.

I would suggest that a better explanation lies among those offered by Plutarch, which Cherry quickly passes over. Plutarch's discussion of the prohibition on the giving of gifts between husband and wife considers not only practical reasons of property dispensation but also social values (*Quaest. Rom.* 7.265 F–266A). The first of Plutarch's four explanations proceeds in the same vein as Ulpian, pointing to a financial problem that could arise from conjugal affection. It may be, Plutarch says, that Romans followed the precedent of a statute enacted by the Athenian law-giver Solon, who declared that a will made by a man under the influence of his wife was invalid. The suggestion seems to be that a wife can impair a man's judgment in gift-giving, and that this impairment would somehow be increased by the couple's own exchange of gifts. Plutarch's second explanation looks to the well-being of the relationship itself.

ἡ φαυλότατον ἡγούμενοι σημεῖον εὐνοίας τὸ διδόναι (διδόασι γὰρ καὶ ἀλλότριον καὶ μὴ φιλοῦντες) ἐκ τοῦ γάμου τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρέσκειαν ἀνείλον, ὅπως ἄμισθον ἢ καὶ προῖκα καὶ δι' αὐτὸ μὴ δι' ἄλλο τὸ φιλεῖσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν. (*Quaest. Rom.* 7.265 F)

Or did (the Romans) think that gift-giving is a negligible show of marital harmony? For even those who do not hold one another dear give gifts. Did they thus think that such gift-giving prevented the sort of obliging interaction in which mutual affection is unpaid for, freely given, for itself and with no other aim?¹³

His third explanation centers on propriety: gifts were associated with strangers trying to seduce wives, and it was inappropriate for a husband to appear to be trying to cajole his wife in a similar way. Plutarch's final explanation for the ban on gifts returns to the health of the relationship. Romans may simply have thought that the property of husbands and wives should be held in common. Giving gifts would have led to the idea that everything in the household was owned by one or the other person who had received it or had a right to give it.

Though a Greek observer of Roman values, Plutarch was deeply versed in Roman culture. His first explanation for the ban, the influence of Solon's law, seems far-fetched, but the others seem to reflect real possibilities in the Roman cultural matrix. The ideal Roman marriage was one that stressed cooperation, partnership (*societas*), and shared property, and could include real romantic love (Treggiari 1991: 231–32, 239, 242, 250–60). Thus Plutarch's second explanation, that the gift ban was to protect and promote true generosity of sentiment, and his fourth, that there was an ideal of common property even if the law made it separable, have the virtue of according with other Roman conjugal values. Yet Plutarch's conjectures present something of a paradox. In his second explanation, he suggests that Romans might have been concerned that affection should be something unpaid for (ἄμισθον) and freely given (προῖκα). These are exactly the qualities expected in an act of gift-giving, but instead they are to be preserved by a ban on gifts.

The paradox is explained by the fact that the ethic of unbought and freely given gifts, while still held out as an ideal, had become marginalized in Roman public life. Most conspicuously, elites gave large gifts to further their political careers. Caesar's employment of lavish public entertainments while he was aedile to build a political following was unusual perhaps only for its scale and his willingness to appropriate all credit from his colleague Bibulus (Suet. *Iul.* 10). When Plutarch alludes to Crassus's noted willingness to use his wealth to build political favor, he introduces a telling example of gifts becoming payments. He writes that Crassus would lend money to friends at no interest, but required repayment precisely on the agreed date. The result was that the generosity that Crassus showed by giving freely (προϊκα) became more burdensome to his associates than the interest would have been (τὸ προῖκα πολλῶν ἐγένετο τόκων ἐπαχθέστερον, Plut. *Crass.* 3.1). Beyond such spectacular examples, routine economic transactions were often conducted as exchanges of gifts or favors, to such an extent, in fact, that the concept of trust in a friend and commercial credit were merged in one term, *fides* (Verboven 2002).

If the prohibition on gifts in marriage was indeed put into effect in the early part of the first century BCE, then, it would necessarily represent a response to the prevailing socioeconomic climate¹⁴ and effectively constitute an attempt by Roman *nobiles* to prevent the notion of gifts as taking hold in their marital lives. The law would thus be directed not at preserving the individual financial and social interests of the husband but rather at fostering the mutual harmony and affection of married couples that Romans prized as a refuge from public maneuvering. The giving of small gifts could be exempted from the ban as an incorruptibly humble domain where husband and wife could express truly generous regard and affection.

Ovid's Stingy Lover

I turn now to Ovid's *Am.* 1.10 as evidence for this explanation of the gift ban. Taking the *Amores* as evidence for Roman marriage values might seem counterintuitive, if not perverse. The collection celebrates illegitimate love affairs and is a strong candidate for the work that earned Ovid relegation to the Black Sea from a censorious Octavian. But it is precisely because the lover–*puella* relationship represents a complicated inversion of the conjugal bond that it offers an opportunity for Ovid to deploy concepts integral to marriage. My claim is thus that Ovid draws in part upon the exchange discourse of the household in creating a fictional and partly antithetical representation of his relationship with his *puella*.¹⁵ In doing so, he gives evidence that the husband–wife exchange relationship was constructed around a notion of sharing opposed to potentially mercenary gifts.

Before proceeding to discuss Ovid's elegy, it is necessary to delimit the territory under consideration. My primary concern is to investigate how the rhetoric of different types of exchange is employed in a context that invites their use and manipulation.¹⁶ I will thus skirt some of the larger problems in the interpretation of Ovidian elegy. The correlation with any underlying reality of relationships

between lovers and their beloveds does not concern me *per se*, nor does the fact that Ovid is often seen as parodying the genre of elegy itself (McKeown 1987: 17–19). I take Ovid to be engaging aspects of socioeconomic discourse from his society in an attempt to construct a fresh and amusing approach to elegiac commonplaces. And, just as modern comedians miss the mark unless their jokes are grounded in agreed-upon social facts, presumably Ovid cannot amuse his audiences if his analogies for the elegiac relationship are not grounded in accepted Roman social realities. As a contribution to our understanding of Roman elegy, in the course of my discussion I do hope to show that one of Ovid's strategies for refreshing his chosen genre was to forgo vivid, lifelike situations in favor of the comic interplay of social discourses.

The particular commonplace that Ovid starts from is that of the greedy girl. The poor elegiac lover complains that his beloved *puella* demands too much from him and frets about the favors she showers on rich rivals.¹⁷ Among the elegists, the greedy-girl topos comes to generate the greatest number of references to gifts. The proto-Roman elegist Catullus makes relatively few mentions of gifts when ruminating on his beloved Lesbia. Indeed, one of the few instances involves a gift of perfume that she seems to have given him (13.9–14).¹⁸ Our meager fragments of Gallus, the founder of Roman elegy, mention no gifts explicitly, only the production of poems fit for his mistress (*domina*) (Courtney 1993: 263, frag. 2.7). Propertius and Tibullus, rough contemporaries in the second half of the first century BCE, initiate in earnest the motif of girls demanding gifts. Already in the second poem of his first book, Propertius complains about his Cynthia bestowing her favors upon other men who give her gifts (1.2). In the latter part of his four-book opus, Propertius ties this complaint to the public matters he increasingly dwells on, making his *puella*'s greed for gold symptomatic of a decadent society steeped in luxury (e.g., 3.13; cf. 4.14.81–82). Tibullus represents himself in similar straits, and distills the lover's predicament into several pungent phrases. He reverses Vergil's aphorism that "desire conquers all" (*omnia uincit amor*, *Ecl.* 10.69) to declare instead that *donis uincitur omnis amor* (1.5.60), "any love will be beaten by [someone else with] gifts." After claiming that his girl's greed effectively rewards those who commit crimes for money,¹⁹ Tibullus sums up his harsh portrait by calling her a "rapacious mistress" (*dominamque rapacem*, 2.4.25).²⁰

If Propertius introduced the gift-hungry *puella* and Tibullus sharpened criticism of her,²¹ Ovid takes up and elaborates these themes in his own way in his first work, the *Amores*. In general, Ovid forgoes the immediacy of the amatory situations represented by Propertius and Tibullus in favor of a style that draws attention to the ironies of his affairs with Corinna and others.²² In the case of his treatment of gifts, for example, Ovid appropriates from Tibullus the argument that lovers with greedy *puellae* are all but compelled to commit crimes to satisfy them. Where Tibullus warns about what lovers are driven to, Ovid conjures up a still starker picture of a victorious rival. This lucky object of his girl's affection is a soldier who has done nothing less than feed richly on the blood of others (*recens diues ... sanguine pastus*, 3.8.9–10; *possidet inuentas sanguine miles opes*, 3.8.55), a monster

whose gore-drenched hand (*dextram tange – cruenta fuit*, 3.8.16) Ovid's avaricious mistress does not hesitate to grasp.

Ovid practices a similar escalation in *Am.* 1.10, though in a different direction. Within the elegiac corpus, *Am.* 1.10 is unique in its patent introduction of general Roman proprieties of gift and payment for comparison with the traditional gift-giving discourse of elegy. The lover opens *Am.* 1.10 by telling his mistress Corinna that he is no longer infatuated with her, then gives the reason:

cur sim mutatus, quaeris? quia munera poscis.
haec te non patitur causa placere mihi.
donec eras simplex, animum cum corpore amavi;
nunc mentis uitio laesa figura tua est. (11–14)

Why have I changed, you ask? Because you're asking for gifts.
That's the reason I can't like you.
When you were guileless, I loved your mind and body;
Now your foul intention spoils your beauty.

He proceeds to say that the gods of love do not work for money (15–20), that even prostitutes must be forced by their pimps to accept pay (21–24), and that not even animals take a fee for sex, only women. He then continues:

sola uiro mulier spoliis exultat adeptis,
sola locat noctes, sola licenda uenit,
et uendit quod utrumque iuuat quod uterque petebat,
et pretium, quanti gaudeat ipsa, facit.
quae Venus ex aequo uentura est grata duobus,
altera cur illam uendit et alter emit?
cur mihi sit damno, tibi sit lucrosa uoluptas,
quam socio motu femina uirque ferunt?
Non bene conducti uendunt periuria testes,
non bene selecti iudicis arca patet.
turpe reos empti miseros defendere lingua;
quod faciat magni, turpe tribunal, opes;
turpe tori reditu census augere paternos,
et faciem lucro prostituisset suam.
gratia pro rebus merito debetur inemptis;
pro male conducto gratia nulla toro.
omnia conductor soluit; mercede soluta
non manet officio debitor ille tuo.
parcite, formosae, pretium pro nocte pacisci;
non habet euentus sordida praeda bonos.
non fuit armillas tanti pepigisse Sabinas,
ut premerent sacrae uirginis arma caput;
e quibus exierat, traiecit uiscera ferro
filius, et poenae causa monile fuit.

Nec tamen indignum est a diuite praemia posci;
 munera poscenti quod dare possit, habet.
 carpite de plenis pendentes uitibus uuas;
 praebeat Alcinoi poma benignus ager!
 officium pauper numeret studiumque fidemque;
 quod quis habet, dominae conferat omne suae.
 est quoque carminibus meritas celebrare puellas
 dos mea; quam uolui, nota fit arte mea.
 scindentur uestes, gemmae frangentur et aurum;
 carmina quam tribuent, fama perennis erit.
 nec dare, sed pretium posci dedignor et odi;
 quod nego poscenti, desine uelle, dabo! (Ovid *Am.* 1.10.29–64)

Only woman delights in the spoils she takes.
 She alone rents out her nights, sells herself.
 Not only does she sell something for every taste,
 But she sets whatever price makes her happy.
 If sexual pleasure is equally pleasing to both
 Why is one selling and the other buying?
 Why do I take a loss and you profit from the pleasure
 of man and woman moving in rhythm?
 Witnesses shouldn't be hired to sell perjuries.
 Judges shouldn't have their wallets open.
 It's a disgrace for a wretched defendant to hire a lawyer.
 Only a shameful court judges parties by their wealth.
 It's a disgrace to increase the family estate on your back
 And to sell your good looks for lucre.
 Gratitude is rightly due for things unbought.
 There's no gratitude for a high-priced lay.
 Whoever hires pays off everything. Once money changes hands,
 the buyer doesn't owe you any favors.
 Ladies, stop using your looks to negotiate a price for the night.
 Your foul gains won't turn out well.
 The maiden Tarpeia lost her bargain for the Sabines' armbands,
 When she was crushed by the weight of their shields.
 Eriphyle's son stabbed the belly that bore him,
 Because his mother sought a necklace at her husband's expense.
 Still, it's fine to ask a rich man for rewards.
 He has gifts he can give to whoever asks.
 Pluck grapes dangling from full vines;
 Let the good orchards of Alcinous offer their fruits!
 The poor man counts effort and good faith as his main duties
 Whatever a man has, let him give it all to his mistress.
 I add to that my celebration of worthy girls in verse.
 My art makes famous whatever girl I wish.
 Beautiful clothes will wear and tear, gems and gold be crushed;
 The fame that my verse gives will last forever.
 It's not the giving that I hate, but being asked for payment.
 Whatever I refuse to give – stop asking and I'll give it!

The ostensible goal of the poem's lover is to persuade his beloved to have sex with him without demanding gifts. Ovid employs a number of poetic strategies to make this case and provide variety to his reworking of the commonplaces of the greedy *puella*, the poor lover, and the superior gift of song (James 2001: 250). Among these is an effort to reach outside the traditional borders of elegiac discourse to introduce Roman social realia. Ovid appeals to beliefs about exchange, embodied in social behaviors and laws, as axiomatic, suggesting that they can be taken as evidence of Roman social tenets undistorted by generic conventions.

The lover's main contention to Corinna is that it is improper to ask him for a gift in return for her sexual favors.²³ His first rhetorical move is to characterize his *puella*'s request as part of a commodity transaction. Here Ovid takes advantage of the fact that every gift-exchange can be portrayed as a payment if one chooses to ignore or dispel any attendant feelings of goodwill (*uoluntas*) or gratitude (*gratia*).²⁴ Having framed the *puella*'s request for a gift as a request for payment, Ovid proceeds to introduce examples of things that should not be bought, starting first from the law. If we needed any further evidence that Ovid was more concerned with the rhetorical play of his poetry than the representation of a real amatory situation, this choice would certainly suffice. Few lovers would have been clever enough to know something about the law and dull enough to imagine that they could persuade their girlfriends with legal analogies.

But Ovid ventures on, with a list of legal services considered illegitimate to pay for. As we might expect, he tells Corinna that one should not influence witnesses or judges with bribes. More surprising to modern eyes, there was a law against paying lawyers: the Roman *lex Cincia* of 204 BCE forbade legal advocates from receiving payment or gifts for their services, before or after a legal proceeding (Crook 1967: 90–91).²⁵ The law might have been on Ovid's mind since recent violations led Augustus to strengthen it in 17 BCE, just as Ovid was publishing the original, five-book edition of his *Amores* (Dio Cassius 54.18.2).²⁶ Ovid presents this prohibition in *Am.* 1.10 as simply outlawing payment, with no mention of the possibility of gifts. He has already characterized Corinna's request for gifts as one for payment, so he wants to continue his emphasis on how payment is unsuitable, and even illegal, in various contexts, and suppress any notion of true gratitude in a potential exchange between himself and his *puella*. After thus setting Corinna up rhetorically, he nails down his argument with what are clearly self-evident and incontrovertible aphorisms on Roman exchange behavior: gratitude arises only from things unbought (*gratia pro rebus merito debetur inemptis*, 43), but payment leaves the debtor free from obligation (*omnia conductor soluit; mercede soluta / non manet officio debitor ille tuo*, 45–46). Expecting the warmth of gratitude between lovers when one asks for payment, Ovid says, is folly; commodity exchange is no way to build trust between lawyer and client, much less an amorous relationship.

Within this rhetorical gambit, Ovid is able to collapse gifts and payments into one precisely because they are difficult to distinguish in the public sphere, as the prohibition on both gifts and payments to legal advocates suggests. Conversely, with Corinna he insists upon a distinction between gift and commodity.

Ovid portrays her, and, in a bout of misogyny, a class of women like her, as engaging in the mercenary trade of sexual favors for money even more willingly than prostitutes, who, he alleges, must at least be compelled to the business by their pimps. Ovid's tact is again on full display: comparing his girlfriend to a prostitute is probably not a winning move. But the analogy has a specious plausibility because there is no incontestable criterion for distinguishing gifts to girlfriends from payment for sex. When the lover says his girlfriend is worse than a prostitute because she engages in such trade without being compelled to, he suppresses precisely the other dimensions of a relationship (affection, social interdependence) not present in prostitution that make her interested enough to come to him voluntarily.

Setting aside such harsh terms, the lover continues making his case by contrasting Corinna's current behavior with the ideal of a cooperative and harmonious amorous relationship to which he urges her to aspire. When he says he is happy to give, if only her request does not make his gift-giving feel like payment (63–64), he appeals to a notion of proper gift-exchange of the sort mentioned by Seneca. On this model, gift-exchange must be performed in such a way as to seem authentic (no asking for gifts). Participants show that they are involved in a wider experience of reciprocity by acting with goodwill and gratitude in a relationship that at least partly ignores immediate value and status distinctions. They thereby suggest that they have affective ties and act out an ongoing relationship and the pursuit of mutual interest as well as self-interest. Of course, the model of cooperative gift-exchange inherent in Ovid's ideal necessarily glosses over the inevitable asymmetry of his relationship with Corinna. However much this lover may portray himself as poor and subject to the demands of his mistress, he retains the upper hand by virtue of his higher financial and social status.

Ovid's strategy nevertheless gains some rhetorical traction because it replicates a real and consequential approach to mitigating social asymmetry in Roman society. The subordination and the perpetuation of asymmetrical relationships through reciprocity are common features of the Roman political system at least from the time of Cicero, who claims that Roman elites fear to be out-given and so made into clients,²⁷ to the imperial period, when nobles could be overwhelmed by massive gifts from the *princeps*. But as we move away from the sphere of political contest, the ideology of generous giving helps to smooth over such disparities. If there were in some less stridently political relationships feelings of goodwill and gratitude, and if gifts and favors were consequently granted without a strict accounting for their value and for the status distinctions they promoted, then we would expect some blurring of the terms for such status distinctions. And, indeed, this is what we find in social contexts where potential social superiors and inferiors emphasize an equality in their relationship by giving it the name *amicitia*, or "friendship." Business partners commonly referred to one another as *amici*, thereby emphasizing their cooperation in a venture rather than relative disparities in status (Verboven 2002). Poets who were in close contact with the Augustan regime did not find themselves labeled "clients" of the vastly more wealthy and powerful *princeps*, but instead participated in a "friendship" with the emperor and

his circle (White 1993: x and passim). Of course disparities remained in such relationships, and power was exercised asymmetrically. But conceptions such as “friendship” that framed reciprocal relationships had real practical force, such that, at a minimum, for a friend to remain such, he could not be put under the same level of compulsion that a nonfriend could.²⁸ Beyond that minimum, the insistence by Seneca, Ovid himself, and others that a real reciprocal relationship transcends strict personal interest means that such relationships had some other component. The most obvious candidate for this *tertium quid* is some positive emotion, of generosity, affection, or both, giving us indirect evidence for the affective dimension of some reciprocal relationships.

Ovid’s proposal for a “true” gift relationship with Corinna thus has him doing at least two things at once. On the one hand, he is continuing his argument that Corinna should desist in asking him for gifts by invoking a high-minded notion of real gift-exchange. This is plainly a continuation of self-interested arguments: he claims that he will give her gifts if she does not ask for them but certainly on his own terms. When will he think to give them if she fails to remind him? On the other hand, Ovid can be seen to be appealing to a real social mechanism that does allow for the setting aside of inequalities in an affectionate relationship. Ovid the lover is thus playing both sides with Corinna in an effort to cajole her. Ovid the poet generates interest with the conflict of two complementary and enriching views of same situation.

This complex gesture in turn complements Ovid’s earlier invocation of another aspect of gift discourse, and here we return to the subject of the first part of this chapter. Before he comes to the harsher arguments and resolution just examined, Ovid’s lover tries out another approach. I cite again lines 33–36:

quae Venus ex aequo uentura est grata duobus,
 altera cur illam uendit et alter emit?
 cur mihi sit damno, tibi sit lucrosa uoluptas,
 quam socio motu femina uirque ferunt?

If sexual pleasure is equally pleasing to both,
 Why is one selling and the other buying?
 Why do I take a loss and you profit from the pleasure
 of man and woman moving in rhythm?

Here, too, Ovid condemns commodity exchange in an erotic relationship (*uendit ... emit*). Ovid’s use of the word *grata* seems to suggest that he is contrasting this negative alternative with the process of giving and receiving gifts and favors (*gratiam facere, referre*).

A closer look shows the poet using language not about individual agents exchanging gifts and favors with good will but rather about their sharing without concern for individual agency. Though it suggests reciprocal generosity and good will, the word *grata* here refers rather to the pleasing experience of lovemaking. Likewise, the other key terms defining this aspect of the relationship look not

toward gift-exchange but to a communal and shared experience. Sexual pleasure is equally (*ex aequo*) pleasing, and lovers move in a common rhythm (*socio motu*). In strict terms, Ovid uses these phrases to describe sexual intercourse, but he gives these words a broader application by using them in an analogy for how man and woman in an amatory relationship should act toward one another generally. The phrase *ex aequo* can just mean “equally,” and Ovid uses it this way throughout his corpus. But he also uses it twice in his later work, the *Ars Amatoria*, to describe the particular intimacy of lovemaking.²⁹ It takes on another cast in *Am.* 1.10, however, in conjunction with the phrase *socio motu*. In the *Amores*, Ovid generally uses the adjective *socius* in contexts that describe marriage (*socii sanguinis* (2.14.32) for the blood of a husband and wife’s offspring; *socii tori* (3.6.82) for the marriage bed; or in ways that extend the notion of marriage to his relationship with Corinna (*socios* ... *Penates* (2.11.7), of Corinna fleeing Ovid’s household). This connection is not surprising, given that, as we saw above, a sense of *societas*, or communal purpose, was one of the key desired virtues in Roman marriage. The phrase *socio motu* thus draws some of its meaning from the discourse of married life. In this context, the phrase *ex aequo* anticipates and doubles the notion of communality in the word *socio*.³⁰ We find another inflection of this idea as well in the poet’s later advice that lovers should in the end give whatever they have to their mistresses: *quod quis habet, dominae conferat omne suae*, 59. Here Ovid extends the communitarian ethic from sexual to financial matters.

In addition to the concepts of commodity and gift-exchange at work in *Am.* 1.10, then, Ovid also puts into play a notion of the communal nature of the marriage relationship. Ovid’s approach is amusing, at least for his male audience, because he paradoxically takes the high road of calling for mutual shared affection in service of the thoroughly self-interested goal of getting sex and keeping his coin. As evidence for social beliefs, Ovid’s rhetorical gambit supports the interpretation of the conjugal gift ban as designed to keep the compromised values of gift-exchange from the household. Ovid opposes the ideal of communality both to gift-exchange degraded into commodity trade and, by extension, to commodity trade itself. His use of conjugal language to form this opposition suggests that it was drawn from a similar opposition between communality and corrupted gift-giving associated with marriage. Ovid’s call to his mistress to stop asking for gifts and join him in shared love thus reflects, however tendentially, an equivalent ideal for married life that the legal gift ban was meant to uphold.

Consideration of *Am.* 1.10 can also help us understand how conventions of poetic genre could shape the presentation of gift-exchange values. Unlike the sort of amicable exchange of favors we witness between Horace and his generous friend Maecenas in the *Odes* (Bowditch 2001), gift-exchanges in elegy are necessarily troubled, since they take place within a conventionally discordant relationship. The elegiac lover, who controls the discourse of the poem, avails himself of the ability to characterize gifts for his own rhetorical advantage. One part of this strategy involves depriving gifts of their particularity. To acknowledge that a *puella* had requested a necklace, for example, would introduce a notion of pleasure that the

lover wishes to exclude. The beauty of a necklace would suggest the beauty of the *puella*, the pleasures of the relationship, and the giving and sharing of those pleasures. The suggestion of pleasure beyond utility would in turn evoke the idea of a generosity in giving that goes beyond what is necessary. All of these notions the lover seeks to exclude when addressing the *puella*'s request for the gift, so that he can present her as acting in the most calculated fashion. Elegiac lovers thus typically lament having to give gifts without mentioning what the gifts requested actually are. The gifts the *puella* requests appear simply as commodities, and as the lover thus devalues gifts and gift-exchange, he correspondingly devalues the request of the *puella* and her bargaining position.

The devaluation not only serves the interest of the stingy lover but also forms part of an overall picture of what gifts are and should be. If Roman praise poetry tends to portray reciprocal relations between friends as harmonious and mutually beneficial (Bowditch 2001), and if heroic epic in its normative form tends to assert the sort of power of gifts to bring society together posited by Cicero,³¹ then elegy stands with epigram (Spisak 1998) among the notionally lower genres that treat ordinary situations where gift practices are more often lamented than celebrated. In particular, the interest of the elegiac lover in denigrating gifts drives socioeconomic discourse in two opposite directions, as *Am.* 1.10 shows most fully. It mainly tends to reinforce the notion from Roman public life that all gifts exchanges are in fact instrumental, even in intimate personal relationships. Yet the elegiac lover's resort to the analogy of married love as a gift-free ideal is also part of an elegiac normalization of a retreat from the public sphere into a life of personal pleasures and pursuits. It imagines a fantasy existence where lovers enjoy the shelter of the conjugal space without incurring the obligations of marriage.

Conclusions

Roman society of the late Republic and early empire was characterized by a high reliance on gift transactions to conduct its social, political, and economic affairs. It nevertheless defined one social sphere where this discourse could not intrude, the core household relationship of the married couple. By contrast, Plutarch attests that in the Greek world, gifts within the household were permitted. Following the interpretation laid out above, a major reason for this difference may have been that the Greek public gift-giving was less systematic and pervasive. Gifts did not come to be seen as instrumental to the extent that they did at Rome, so that the intimate sphere of interaction between husband and wife did not need legal protection from them. If Roman reciprocity is comparatively more widespread and institutionalized in the public sphere, it is also bounded in a way that Greek reciprocity was not.

At the same time, to return to another cross-cultural comparison with which we began, Jewish and Roman cultures of exchange do not appear quite as different as it might seem. Schwartz stresses the instrumentality of Roman gift-exchange, its use for subordination and control, and its ultimate function in organizing and

uniting Roman society (Schwartz 2010: 9). In fact, such forms of exchange, though common in public interactions, were only one end of a gradient that proceeded to forms of reciprocity that were less instrumental (the *προίκᾶ* exchange of Plutarch) into a realm where it was prohibited. Schwartz argues that the rabbis articulated and defended the ideal of a Jewish society unified by a communal ethic and shared identity in the face of the perils of Roman gift culture. Roman leaders in fact responded similarly to the problems of their own gift culture by creating a sphere within their society that gift-exchange could penetrate only in its most diminished and least disruptive forms.

These conclusions introduce a qualification to the view set out by Mauss in his seminal work on gift-exchange (Mauss 1990). Mauss demonstrated the cross-cultural rule that there is no “free gift,” but that every grant of gift or favor calls for a counter-gift and so alters the balance of social relations. Indeed, he denies specifically the possibility of a free gift between husband and wife that Malinowski argued for among the Trobriand Islanders.³² But while any gift can be regarded as transactional, recent studies have returned to Malinowski to emphasize the importance of the ideological position within a culture that regards or seeks to normalize gifts as free from obligation.³³ Following this line of reasoning, instead of regarding gifts as simply transactional or nontransactional, we might rather keep in mind that these two natures can coexist in varying degrees as social realities. Thus, the case of gift-exchange between Roman husbands and wives is one where a communal, nontransactional ideology strongly influences perception and behavior.

It is also important to consider how broader movements in socioeconomic and political conditions can lead to alterations in gift mores over time. Ovid’s application of socioeconomic discourses to elegy suggests how this general configuration of Roman socioeconomic belief and practice may in fact have been shifting in the late Augustan and early imperial period. The advent and continuance of the principate coincided with an overall retreat from public into private life on the part of elites with the luxury to choose how their hours were spent. Forensic oratory became less attractive once the *princeps* monopolized political power,³⁴ and the abandonment of the forum for the study was accompanied by a corresponding intellectual turn from the sifting of public affairs to the examination of one’s own interior psychic and mental space. The change is evident in the difference between the letters of Cicero, full of political maneuverings, and those of Seneca, which focus on achieving mental and emotional tranquility.³⁵ In his earliest works, written before he was forced to sing his palinode and nearly a century before Seneca withdrew from public affairs, Ovid fashioned himself as the greatest poet of Roman private life. When he congratulates himself for living in a more civilized age, saying it suits his nature,³⁶ he revels in the opportunities afforded by the cosmopolitan private life he celebrates in the *Amores* and other early poems. Ovid did not just observe this private culture, however; he also helped to create it. His relegation to the Black Sea as punishment for his poetry³⁷ attests to the fact that Augustus understood Ovid’s words had the power to shape social norms. By celebrating the life of love affairs, Ovid encouraged a turn toward private life at a time when the consolidation of the

principate was already making withdrawal a practical necessity. To the attractions of the erotic life, he added the inducement of avoiding the false and problematic public trade in gifts in favor of a shared existence. We might doubt that Ovid's female readers would have found his one-sided elegiac relationship alluring. But Octavian's decision to punish Ovid for his influence on Roman mores suggests that his male readers may have been attracted by the prospect of a withdrawal from gift-exchange politics into a more serene private life.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Fanny Dolansky and Martha Malamud, whose suggestions led to substantial improvements in this piece.
- 2 Flaig 1993, 300–301, upon which I also draw in the remainder of this paragraph.
- 3 Cicero *Off.* 1.56: *magna etiam illa communitas est, quae conficitur ex beneficiis ultro et citro datis acceptis, quae et mutua et grata dum sunt, inter quos ea sunt, firma deuinciuntur societate* (“Great moreover is the concord that arises from the granting of benefits given and received back and forth. Provided these are mutually and freely given, those who partake in this exchange are bound together by a firm tie of allegiance”); Seneca *Ben.* 1.4.2: *de beneficiis dicendum est et ordinanda res, quae maxime humanam societatem alligat* (“I begin now to speak about and lay out the matter of benefactions, which binds human societies together most of all”). Schwartz 2010: 168 notes that he finds no evidence for such a theory in ancient Jewish writings.
- 4 Griffin 2003, who provides a thorough analysis of the exchange discourse in *De beneficiis*, including comparison with Cicero's positions.
- 5 Highlighted particularly in studies of patronage, e.g., Saller 1982, and studies of literary patronage such as Gold 1982 and Nauta 2002.
- 6 Cicero *Fin.* 5.22.61, on how children remember a benefit given to them: *quae memoria est in iis bene merentium, quae referendae gratiae cupiditas*.
- 7 Donlan 1982 provides a useful overview, which I draw on here, esp. p. 140.
- 8 My focus will be on the male–female intimate relationship. I leave out of consideration for the purposes of this piece the extended family members who formed a necessary part of Roman kinship structures, as well as relationships between freeborn, freedmen, and slave members of households.
- 9 The following section follows the account of Cherry 2002.
- 10 Treggiari 1991: 371 discusses this and other practical exceptions to the gift-giving ban. Dolansky 2011 argues that the Matronalia focused on the health of the conjugal couple and their offspring, rather than simply upon wives.
- 11 *moribus apud nos receptum est, ne inter uirum et uxorem donationes ualerent. hoc autem receptum est, ne mutuo amore inuicem spoliarentur donationibus non temperantes, sed profusa erga se facilitate*, *Dig.* 24.1.1.
- 12 Other practical reasons brought up in the digest include the argument that couples giving gifts might lose interest in the good of their children, and that, when such gifts came to be expected, marriage matches might go to those who could give the most, and so essentially be for sale (*Dig.* 24.1.2). See Treggiari 1991: 366–71 for an overview of the prohibition.
- 13 This and all other translations are mine.

- 14 The examples given above are mainly from the late first century, but such patterns of behavior began earlier. For an example of gifts given as bribes for political office, see Plut. *Mar.* 5.2.
- 15 The mistress of elegy is typically understood to be defined against the figures of both the housewife (*matrona*) and the prostitute (*meretrix*). See, e.g., Myers 1996: 5.
- 16 “The elegiac text is neither a simple window onto Augustan reality nor a transcendent linguistic artifact that has no relation to its historical moment of conception. Rather, the investigation of elegy becomes an inquiry into what Clifford Geertz described ... as ‘social semantics’: a decoding of a culture’s textual gestures of signification. In turn, these ‘gestures of signification’ should not be seen as a passive reaction to contextual pressures but as an attempt to intervene actively in such ideological sites of contestation. Hence, a poet’s textual narration in its rhetorical manipulation of the hierarchical relations of self, society, and reader forms a type of microcosm to a contemporaneous macrocosm of ideological disputation” (Fear 2000: 154; cf. Wyke 2002: 14–15; James 2003: 6). The same could in essence be said for all cultural artifacts, but the difficulty of correlating elegiac scenarios with other information about Roman society makes the apparent disparity between text and social context more acute.
- 17 James 2003: 71–107 offers a concise summary of the gestures involved in this commonplace, and a survey of key examples.
- 18 In fact, Catullus writes that the Muses gave it to Lesbia as a gift, and he offers to give some to his friend Fabullus. That this was a gift from Lesbia to Catullus is only an inference.
- 19 *at mihi per caedem et facinus sunt dona paranda / ne iaceam clausam flebilis ante domum* (2.4.21–2), “But I am forced to commit slaughter and crimes to bring her gifts if I do not wish to sprawl weeping before her closed doors.”
- 20 Modern critics have pointed out that the dynamics of the situation look much different if we situate ourselves in the position of the *puella* represented in the text. The poet represents her demands as arbitrary and optional, whereas a reading from her perspective suggests they arise instead from necessity. As James 2003: 84 puts it, the *puella* is characterized as “greedy rather than needy.”
- 21 I am suggesting only a logical, not a temporal, progression, as the two were contemporaries. For a detailed account of the mutual influence of the two poets, see Lyne 1998.
- 22 This prevailing line of interpretation is summed up by Conte 1994: 343–44, who writes regarding the *Amores* that “the drama of Catullus or Propertius, the intense adventure of their existence, becomes in Ovid little more than a *lusus* [‘game’], and the experience of eros is examined by the poet with irony and intellectual detachment... . The Ovidian elegy no longer presents itself as subordinate to life, as its faithful reflection, but it asserts its own primacy, its own centrality in the poet’s existence.”
- 23 Ovid shifts position somewhat at the end of the poem, allowing that it is acceptable for a mistress to ask a gift of a sufficiently rich lover. I take this shift as variation for the purpose of entertainment offering an alternative position, but one that does not impair the ability of his first argument to stand on its own as plausible in Roman social discourse.
- 24 Cross-cultural examples testify to a widespread, if not universal, concern that one’s gifts could suffer just this sort of narrow interpretation. In a study of charity given to Shvetambar Jain renouncers, Laidlaw 2002 shows the lengths to which members of some cultures will go to ensure that no sense of obligation arises from an apparent gift. The renouncers lead an ascetic life of prayer that excludes any work that could bring

them sustenance. They survive by engaging in a ritual of receiving alms as food, all the while protesting that they are unwilling to accept it. Schwartz 2010: 132, 168 demonstrates how, in a related way, Jewish norms upheld by the rabbis of the classical period encouraged ingratitude on the part of the recipients of charity as a confirmation that the donor had not given with any expectation of reward.

- 25 Advocates did evade the law. See the references at Muse 2004: n. 7 for discussions of how Cicero may have profited from his legal work.
- 26 Dio Cassius 54.18.2.
- 27 Cicero *Off.* 2.69.
- 28 From the sphere of poetic interaction with the *princeps*, we might think of Horace's ability to refuse Augustus's invitation to become the imperial secretary. This is attested in Suetonius *Vita Horatii*, which simultaneously gives evidence of the pressure Augustus did exert on Horace to be included in his writings.
- 29 Ovid encourages young men not to spurn a potential lover because she is old, writing that a virtue of the older lover is that she is more easily pleased, a good circumstance because men and women should enjoy sex equally (*quod iuuat, ex aequo femina uirque ferant*, *Ars Amatoria* 2.682). Later, he simply enjoins both partners to have equal pleasure in lovemaking, *ex aequo res iuuat illa duos*, 3.93.
- 30 Cf. *Ars am.* 1.566 and other references and discussion at Treggiari 1991: 250.
- 31 Coffee 2009 argues that this is true overall for Vergil and in a fractured sense for Statius, and that Lucan reacts consciously against this notion.
- 32 Mauss 1990 [1950]: 73 on Malinowski 1932: 176–79.
- 33 Laidlaw 2002 and Schwartz 2010: 132, 168.
- 34 In Tacitus's *Dialogus de oratoribus*, set in 75 CE, Marius Aper takes his friend Maternus to task for abandoning oratory in favor of poetry. Even Aper, however, spoke only in private disputes and avoided offending the powerful: *nobis satis sit priuatas et nostri saeculi controuersias tueri, in quibus expressis si quando necesse sit pro periclitante amico potentiorum aures offendere, et probata sit fides et libertas excusata* (*Dial.* 10).
- 35 Kahn 1988: 255–59 remarks on “the development of an introspective consciousness and its articulation in volitional terms in the last half-century AD,” a phenomenon Foucault described as a turn toward the care of the self (esp. Foucault 1986: 41). I cite these passages from Edwards 1997: 25, who argues that “these concerns are insistently returned to in Seneca's Letters, as he explores strategies for dispensing with other occupations and devoting oneself to oneself... . Seneca then is one of the foremost figures in a more general turn towards introspection.”
- 36 *prisca iuuent alios: ego me nunc denique natum / gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis ... quia cultus adest, nec nostros mansit in annos / rusticitas, priscis illa superstes auis*, *Ars am.* 3.121–8
- 37 Along with another mysterious cause, the famous *carmen et error* of *Tr.* 2.207. Ovid stood accused of being an “instructor in foul adultery” (*obsцени doctor adulterii*, *Tr.* 2.212) in his early poems.

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Further Reading

For the Roman perspective on gift-exchange, Cicero's On Duties and Seneca's On Benefits are fundamental. Cicero focuses more on what is seemly; Seneca provides a much more extensive investigation of ethical complications. The particularity of the Roman patronage system has drawn the majority of scholarly attention in matters of reciprocity. Important works here are Gold 1982; Saller 1982; Roller 2001; and Nauta 2002. Verboven 2002 provides a thorough overview of Roman gift concepts and vocabulary, and demonstrates the mutual implication of business and reciprocal friendship. For further treatment of the affective dimension of gift-exchange, see Konstan 2006 and his references in this volume.

“Can’t Buy Me Love”: The Economy of Gifts in Amorous Relations

DAVID KONSTAN

Most societies, and certainly classical Greece and Rome, distinguish between gifts, which are freely granted without expectation of return or at least of return in kind, and commercial or economic exchanges, in which things are traded for other things of a comparable value. It is true that a certain tradition, beginning with Marcel Mauss and continued, with substantial variations, by Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida, has called into question whether gifts are ever truly altruistic, and has thereby assimilated them to forms of economic exchange; but this universal critique of the gift obscures the diverse ways in which the tension between gifts and other forms of exchange differs from one society to another and so misses the historical specificity of the paradox, if that is what it is, that inheres in the idea of the gift.¹ The boundary between gifts and commerce is subject to being blurred, no doubt, but blurred in determinate ways that reflect how gifts and commerce are understood and practiced in a given community.² In what follows, I examine a particular instance, recorded in a literary work, in which gifts and commercial exchange, that is, buying and selling, seem to collapse into each other, and I attempt to explain why this happens and what it means for our understanding of one domain of classical behavior and values, namely, erotic relations with courtesan women. But before proceeding to the case study, I first address the nature of gifts as they were understood in antiquity, as well as some aspects of commercial exchange.

Aristotle’s discussion of favors, which is to say, freely bestowed services or material goods without the expectation of repayment, is a good guide to the classical idea of the gift. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses not the usual word for a gift, *dōron*, but rather *charis*, a term rich in meaning but which, in the current context, signifies a freely bestowed favor. Aristotle defines the term as follows: “Let *charis*, then, in accord with which one who has it is said to have *charis*, be a service to one who needs it, not in return for anything, nor so that the one who performs the service may gain something, but so that the other may” (*Rh.* 2.7, 1385A17–19). *Charis*,

then, is something done for another person in an altruistic spirit, with no demand for or expectation of recompense. This much is perfectly clear. There may appear, however, to be some obscurity in the clause “in accord with which one who has it is said to have *charis*,” and I must pause a moment to explain it, for it has led to a scholarly confusion that persisted for several centuries.³ Even though Aristotle provides a definition of *charis* at the opening of this chapter of the *Rhetoric* – it is part of an analysis of several different emotions, including anger, love, hatred, shame, pity, envy, and others – his topic here is not in fact voluntary and selfless benefactions as such, which is scarcely an emotion according to ancient Greek notions. Rather, he is embarking on a discussion of gratitude, for which the Greek expression was “to have *charis*.” Aristotle is suggesting that being the recipient of a favor (“having or receiving a *charis*”) is tantamount to or a condition for the emotion of gratitude: hence, the curious compound phrase that indicates the sentiment. This linking of gratitude to the bestowal of a favor is significant: it suggests that the altruism affirmed in the definition of a *charis* is not entirely unconditional. But it is important to observe that the response to a favor is not a return in kind, but rather an emotion or *pathos* that is elicited by the simple gesture of receiving such a present. Of course, this reaction is not automatic or inevitable; there are ungrateful people who do not respond in this way to help or services rendered, and this is clearly a vice. But the emotional response to receiving a gift is not understood by Aristotle or any other ancient thinker as a return of the favor, or as constituting an economic exchange. And this is the crucial element in the notion of *charis*.

One of the most perplexing passages in Aristotle’s treatment of friendship in Books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is his discussion of the role of *philia* in economic exchange. This is not a domain in which one would have expected bonds of affection to play a role, and yet Aristotle seems to believe that an examination of *philia* – “friendship” when it is reciprocal and between unrelated people, “love” when it applies to a personal sentiment or obtains between kin – is not complete without taking account of its function in commercial relations. Thus, in the final chapter of Book 8, he writes:

It seems that, as justice is of two kinds, one unwritten and the other legal, one kind of friendship of utility is moral [*ēthikē*] and the other legal [*nomikē*]. ... The legal type is that which is on fixed terms; its purely commercial variety is on the basis of immediate payment [literally, hand to hand], while the more liberal variety allows time but stipulates for a definite quid pro quo. In this variety the debt is clear and not ambiguous, but in the postponement it contains an element of friendliness [*philikon*]; and so some states do not allow suits arising out of such agreements, but think men who have bargained on a basis of credit ought to accept the consequences. The moral type is not on fixed terms; it makes a gift, or does whatever it does, as to a friend; but one expects to receive as much or more, as having not given but lent; and if a man is worse off when the relation is dissolved than he was when it was contracted he will complain. This happens because all or most men, while they wish for what is noble, choose what is advantageous; now it is noble to do well by another without a view to repayment, but it is the receiving of benefits that is advantageous. (*Eth. Nic.* 8.13, 1162B21–36; trans. Ross 1908)

In the ethical or moral type of exchange, in which the giver relies on qualities of character in regard to repayment, the transaction seems to take the form of a gift to a friend. But in reality the donor may look for an equal or greater return, as though he had made a loan rather than a gift; a grievance arises because the deal ends in a different spirit from the way it began. Aristotle observes that this happens because people desire to behave honorably but in fact prefer to make a profit (1162B31–36). That tensions should arise when friends borrow from one another is not surprising, but I think the passage points to a deeper interconnection between affection and exchange: apart from payment on the spot, which occurred no doubt at the market stalls in the agora as it does today in shops, all interpersonal exchange, according to Aristotle, is premised on trust and hence on a degree of affection. But the sign of true affection is a generosity that does not insist on return, but seeks the benefit of the other in a spirit of selflessness. Thus, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle begins his investigation into the emotions of love and hatred as follows (2.4, 1380B35–36): “Let us speak of those whom people love [*philousi*] and whom they hate, and why, by first defining ‘love’ [or ‘friendship’: *philia*] and ‘loving’ [*to philein*].” Aristotle continues (1380B36–81A1): “Let loving [*to philein*] be wishing for someone the things that he deems good, for the sake of that person and not oneself, and the accomplishment of these things to the best of one’s ability.” Aristotle adds that a friend (*philos*) must share his friend’s pleasure and pain “for no other reason than the other’s sake” (2.4, 1381A5–6). The element of altruism is clearly reminiscent of Aristotle’s account of a favor, which must be given on similar terms. In doing a favor for another, the response to which is understood to be gratitude, one is acting just as a friend would, out of a concern for the other’s welfare and not one’s own. There is a remarkable intersection between the idea of the gift and love or affection. But this very coincidence can lead to misunderstanding and conflict when a code of generous prestations gets crossed with expectations of return in the form of immediate payment, such as goes on in the marketplace.

Paul Millett has noted the importance of informal financial arrangements in the Athenian economy, as opposed to bank loans at regular rates of interest: “There survives from Athenian sources a mass of material relating to lending and borrowing that makes overall sense only if viewed from the perspective of the gift-exchange relationship identified by Mauss.” Millett goes on to state: “Different conditions of credit were appropriate to the varying degrees of intimacy between the people who made up the *polis*. For those regarded as *philoï* (friends, relatives, neighbours and associates), the kind of borrowers with whom close reciprocal relationships might be established, loans without interest were appropriate. Where the association between lender and borrower was more distant and a reciprocal favour seemed unlikely, it was legitimate to charge interest and require security” (Millett 1991: 183). No doubt there was less trust of strangers than of close acquaintances or family members, but the point I should like to emphasize here is that economic relations, according to Aristotle at least, were implicitly friendly and to this degree not mercantile in the modern sense of the word. Dissension arises just when affection ceases to be the operative motive in the exchange. Thus, a whole variety of

interpersonal relations might assume an aspect of friendship or affection that conditioned how people viewed the meaning and function of their benefactions.⁴

The above discussion is not meant to cast doubt on the distinction between gifts and economic transactions, whether in the form of interest-free loans or credit at fixed rates of profit. In the case of gifts, no return was expected, save the immaterial response consisting in gratitude or the acknowledgment of the benefit received, whereas utilitarian exchange was gift-like in that it involved a large element of the trust that is characteristic of friendship – and friends were expected to help one another selflessly and without setting conditions for compensation – but in fact the beneficiary was morally obliged to repay the debt, and failure to do so was a breach of good faith. Should this happen, according to Aristotle, then the lender has only himself to blame, since he treated as a friend someone who was deficient in this respect and did not recognize the reciprocal duty imposed by the trust that had been placed in him. It is this moral dimension that distinguishes not just the nature of exchange in the classical world but also the way in which the tension between gift-giving and economic transactions was conceived, expressed, and played out – that is, the specific social or historical determination of what we may, if we wish, identify as the paradox of the gift.

Ancient comedy, particularly in the variety called New Comedy that developed in the fourth century BCE and on into the third, after the age of Aristophanes and his contemporaries (conventionally labeled Old Comedy), was a medium well suited to exploring and dramatizing tensions within the prevailing moral code. It staged situations in which families and friends engaged in everyday affairs, though in most cases these were viewed through the lens of erotic attachments and pursuits; as Ovid said of the comedies of the Athenian Menander, the leading dramatist in this genre and the only one whose plays have survived in substantial fragments (one virtually complete): “There is no play by the delightful Menander that is without love [*fabula incundi nulla est sine amore Menandri*]” (*Tristia* 2.1.369). A young man’s passion might come into conflict, for example, with the more practical disposition of his father and thus illustrate the social expectations that governed citizen marriages as well as the impulsive nature of youth. Another scenario involves a youth in love not with a marriageable citizen girl (New Comedy observed the rule that legitimate marriage, with the right of offspring to inherit, could occur only between citizens of Athens) but rather with a woman ineligible for wedlock. Sometimes this was a foreigner or more often an ostensible foreigner, or else a foundling, who could not demonstrate citizen credentials; in the end her (sometimes his) true identity would be revealed in what has come to be called a recognition, often facilitated by birth tokens or other marks or keepsakes that enabled the identification. But a young man might also fall in love with a professional courtesan or *hetaira*, a woman of a class, invariably foreign in New Comedy, who made a living out of their relationships with their lovers.⁵ This is the case most relevant to the topic under investigation here, since it illustrates one dimension of the divergence between the idea of the gift and that of commercial exchange as it was perceived by the Greeks – and it is worth recalling that Menander was said to have studied with Theophrastus, Aristotle’s

successor as head of the Lyceum. It is thus not entirely surprising that Aristotle's discussions of favors, love, and loans or economic transactions should shed light on the values expressed in Menander's comedies.

The comedy that I examine here is *The Eunuch*, which survives in the Latin version composed by Terence in the mid-second century BCE but is based on a play of the same name by Menander, which however is not extant.⁶ The plot turns on the rivalry between two lovers who are in love with the courtesan Thais. One of these is a young man still under the authority of his father; the other a vainglorious mercenary soldier, who has among his retinue a hanger-on who lives by flattery, of the type conventionally referred to in this connection as a parasite. Terence tells us in the prologue to the play that he imported the soldier and the flatterer from another comedy by Menander, and it is possible that the rival in the original *Eunuch* was not a military man. Whatever his occupation, however, the basic plot requires some figure, and indeed one of some wealth and stature, as competitor for the affections of Thais, and such a character must have played a role in Menander's version.

The contention between the two lovers is initially conducted by way of gifts. The soldier, who is named Thraso, sends Thais a very attractive and well-brought-up girl, called Pamphila, while Phaedria, as the lover is called, delivers a decrepit older woman, who is a slave, and together with her a eunuch, from which the comedy takes its title. Now, this eunuch himself cuts rather a wretched figure and so not even the combination of Phaedria's two gifts of human merchandise can compete with the girl that Thraso has presented. As it happens, the soldier's present has yet another advantage over Phaedria's offer: she was in fact raised alongside Thais by Thais's mother, and in addition to a purely sentimental attachment on Thais's part there is reason to think that she is an Athenian citizen (the Latin versions of Greek comedy were set in a Greek context), and this, if true, is of considerable importance to Thais, since she may win the favor and support of the girl's father or guardian, once he is found. But the girl has not yet been handed over to Thais, and so she is obliged to cozy up to the soldier until she is in her possession. To this end, she has made herself available to Thraso at the expense of Phaedria, who naturally resents his exclusion. When Thais explains to Phaedria her reason for locking him out, he declares the story to be a fabrication, and that Thais really loves the soldier. At this point, Phaedria asks: "Is he the only one who gives gifts [*dona dat*]? When have you ever seen my generosity [*benignitas*] toward you shut off? When you told me you wanted a slave girl from Aethiopia, didn't I leave all my other affairs behind and look for one? Then you said you wanted a eunuch too, since only queens employ them. I found one, and yesterday I gave twenty *minae* for the two. Even though I was spurned by you, I nevertheless kept these things in mind. Is it on account of these gestures that I am snubbed by you?" (163–71; my translation). At this, Thais decides to take a risk and declares that she will do whatever Phaedria desires, though it is contrary to her own wishes and better judgment, rather than have him as an enemy. Phaedria replies: "If only you said that from the heart and honestly, 'rather than have you as an enemy'! If I could believe that was sincerely said, I could endure anything" (175–77). Thais assures him that she is speaking

sincerely, and cites her previous favors for him as evidence, whereas he – she complains – will not grant her a mere two days with the soldier. Phaedria reluctantly consents, on condition that the two days not stretch out to twenty, and Thais exclaims: “I love you for good reason, for you are kind to me [*merito te amo, bene facis*]” (186). In a brief soliloquy after Phaedria leaves the stage, Thais expresses her genuine affection for him, and the hope that he is not judging her character by that of other women, that is, courtesans like herself.

What is going on here? Thais is a professional prostitute, to put it vulgarly: she makes a living by selling her favors, above all, sexual favors, though she is also a cultivated and accomplished woman, whose company is agreeable in itself – this was the conventional picture of the *hetaira* or, in Latin, *meretrix*, and that is how they are represented in New Comedy. Yet there is no talk of purchasing her services but rather of gifts that are presented as a sign of complaisance and consideration. In itself, this language might be taken as a kind of courteous indirection, a discreet way of veiling the purely commercial nature of the transaction and treating what is in reality a fee as though it were a donation motivated by sentiment rather than payment, whether at a stipulated price or, in the present instance, in what amounts to a bidding war. There is perhaps a comparable example in the practice of certain public institutions, such as museums, of asking for a contribution – the amount is usually specified – rather than charge a fixed amount for entry, thereby rendering visitors patrons, as it were, instead of customers. In this way, Thais’s clients can imagine that they are not simply buying sex but are participating in a relationship based on mutual affection. Indeed, this was the motive for seeking the favors of a high-priced courtesan such as Thais. Simply to purchase sex, a young man could visit a brothel run by a professional whoremaster and populated by slave girls or women – *pornai* in Greek, *scorta* in Latin – whose services were much cheaper and with whom no enduring connection need be established. Men who could afford to visit a courtesan, however, sought something more. There was no possibility of such a relation ending up in marriage, of course, since courtesans were, as I have indicated, represented as foreign and hence could not wed a citizen, so *hetairai* had to depend on their charms to keep their suitors in tow, or, in other words, to arouse and maintain in them a passionate feeling of love, or, in Greek, of *erōs*. If it worked, the boy was hooked, and would fork over all it took – or at all events, all he had – to be with her. It thus suited both parties to preserve the fiction of a voluntary relationship based on mutual love, even as the hidden or repressed currency of the exchange was cash or cash equivalent – the twenty *minae* that Phaedria has the poor taste to mention aloud, thereby exposing the monetary nature of the transaction. So too, Phaedria’s demand for sincerity on Thais’s part risks unmasking the necessary element of pretense in the very role of the *hetaira*. Indeed, he goes further and, in an expostulation rare in New Comedy and almost romantic in tone, cries out: “What do I want? That when you are with that soldier of yours, you not be with him [*praesens absens ut sies*]; that day and night you love me, miss me, dream of me, wait for me, think of me, hope for me, rejoice in me, be totally with me – to sum it up, become my soul [*animus*], since I am yours” (191–96). Can one really buy such devotion?

Today too, no doubt, lovers and even husbands and wives give gifts, both as an expression of their affection and to elicit and strengthen fondness in the beloved, and the economic value of the present is often a measure both of the feeling that has motivated it and of the expected response.⁷ Love, then, remains a sphere in which the logic of the gift and that of commercial exchange seem particularly to intersect. The reasons for this convergence in the domain of erotic relations lie at least in part in the way erotic passion is mystified and made the basis of long-term relationships that cannot be sustained on enamorment alone. But the institution or social practice of the courtesan trade in classical antiquity – more prominently in Greece than in Rome, where the custom was evidently something of a foreign import – rested on, and perhaps in part also supported, a particular ideology concerning the nature of the gift and the illusion of a noncommercial transaction. As we have seen, a gift or favor was understood as being freely granted without expectation of return, but at the same time was supposed to elicit the emotion of gratitude; ungratefulness was conceived as a moral flaw in the recipient. Phaedria, then, was within his rights to expect that Thais would feel indebted to him for the gifts he bestowed on her, but only in the sense of harboring a positive feeling for him, not as a condition for specific services, which would locate the transaction in the sphere of loans rather than gifts. But inasmuch as acting for the sake of the well-being of another was also regarded as the hallmark of love or friendship, Phaedria might see his actions as signaling not just kindness or beneficence but also his own amorous feelings for Thais, which he could at least hope she would reciprocate – as indeed she confesses to doing. What is more, loans too, unless they took the form of immediate cash exchanges – direct payment “hand to hand,” as Aristotle puts it – were understood to involve a friendly disposition, based on the trust that even utilitarian relationships depend on and evoke. Even if Phaedria was thinking that his gifts entitled him to more than mere gratitude or a return of affection and to some kind of material recompense, such as admission to Thais’s house and the pleasures it offered, he was not entirely out of tune with prevailing notions of the meaning of exchanges of this sort. The idea of *philia* – “love” or “friendship” – extended over or underpinned a range of transactions running from a purely altruistic benefaction – our idea of a freely bestowed gift – to commercial or (as we might see it) quasi-commercial exchanges that looked to realizing some remuneration or even gain; indeed, in this latter type, Aristotle argues, the lender ought not to blame the borrower who fails to reciprocate appropriately but rather himself, since he should have recognized in advance that the recipient did not feel a similar affection. Phaedria might then properly reproach himself, rather than Thais, for having struck a poor bargain with his gifts, insofar as he was not (as he supposed) granted the love and reciprocal benefit that he sought.

Later in Terence’s *Eunuch*, there is another episode in which the courtesan’s love seems to be regarded as being for hire. Thraso enters the stage with the confident bluster typical of the role, as in Plautus’s famous *Braggart Soldier* (*Miles Gloriosus*). But he then reveals a less self-assured side, as he asks the parasite, Gnatho by name, whether he would do well to assure Thais that he is not in love with the girl Pamphila,

as he fears that Thais suspects. Gnatho recommends rather that he increase Thais's jealousy in order to have a weapon against Phaedria: every time she mentions Phaedria, he must counter with a reference to Pamphila: "give tit for tat for this will sting her [*par pro pari referto quod eam mordeat*]" (445). Thraso rather humbly replies: "If in fact she loved me, then it would help, Gnatho" (446). Gnatho answers in turn: "Since she looks forward to and loves what you give her, she has long since loved you, it has long since been easy to hurt her. She is constantly afraid that the profit [*fructus*] she now reaps you may angrily bestow elsewhere." "You're right," says Thraso; "that hadn't occurred to me." "Ridiculous," answers Gnatho, "you just weren't thinking" (447–52). Of course, the joke is on the soldier, who is represented as hopelessly fatuous. But his foolishness is not revealed by his expectation that his gifts will earn him Thais's love, for he shares this attitude with Phaedria. The point is rather that, when the parasite crudely exposes the underlying function of the gifts as mercenary and represents Thais as motivated by pure avarice, Thraso fails to catch the implication and acts as though the courtesan's greed, which was a commonplace in New Comedy as it was in Roman elegy, was entirely compatible with the altruistic nature of favors and the premise that, where recompense is expected, the exchange must rest on a friendly feeling between the two parties. This is just what Aristotle means when he speaks of "moral" or, more precisely, "character-based" (*ēthikē*) friendship in the realm of exchange.

When Thais emerges from her house to greet Thraso, he acts at once on the parasite's advice: "My Thais, my pet, what's up? Do you love me on account of that harp-girl?" (455–57). The coarseness is noticed by Parmeno, a slave of Phaedria's, who is on stage to deliver Phaedria's gifts to Thais: "How charming! What a start he's off to" (455–58). Parmeno in turn announces: "Whenever you're ready, the gifts from Phaedria are here" (464–65). The material nature of the offer is the same as Thraso's; what differs is the intimation that Phaedria's gifts are altruistic rather than a form of payment for love. Indeed, Parmeno suggests that Phaedria's willingness to withdraw to the country for a couple of days is a sign of his superior character. As he puts it: "The man who sent these gifts does not demand that you live for him alone and that others must be locked out for his sake, nor does he tell stories about his battles or show off his scars nor does he get in your way, as a certain party does. Rather, when it is at your convenience, when you wish, when you have the time, he is content to be received then" (480–85). This debonair courtesy makes the gifts themselves seem not so much a down payment for Thais's services as a gesture of genuine liberality and disinterested affection.

In the end, it is Phaedria of course who will win the day, not by virtue of his gifts but as a consequence of a subplot in which his younger brother, Chaerea, falls in love with Pamphila when he sees her being led to Thais's house, and in order to gain access to her, takes the place of the eunuch and is admitted inside, where he rapes the girl. When Pamphila's citizen identity is confirmed, the way is open to marriage between two citizens, and this cements the bond between Thais and Phaedria as well. Thraso is defeated but still love-sick, and he begs Gnatho to help him. Gnatho undertakes to persuade Phaedria to share Thais with the soldier,

on three grounds, of which the first, and doubtless most important, is that Thraso will pay the expenses: "Just think about it, how pleasantly you're living with her, Phaedria (and you do live pleasantly!), but there is little you can give and Thais needs to receive lots; how he [i.e., Thraso] can provide for your love without any expense on your part for all this, and that no one is better suited or more useful to you. First, then, he has enough to give and no one gives more amply [*largius*]" (1073–78). In addition, his silly vanity will be a permanent source of amusement; and, finally, given his absurd character, Thais cannot possibly fall in love with him. On hearing that he has been accepted, Thraso announces that everyone loves him. "Just what you promised," Phaedria says to Gnatho in the final line of the play.

There has been a good deal of argument over the nature of this denouement, which has seemed to some scholars to be both vulgar and inconsistent with Phaedria's passionate attachment to the courtesan; some indeed have ascribed it to Terence's own hand, thereby exonerating Menander from staging so rude an arrangement. The arguments on either side are inconclusive, and I have examined them in greater detail elsewhere.⁸ But, as we have already seen, there is no question of a permanent relationship between Phaedria and Thais; nor is he, as a young man dependent on his father's largesse, in a position to maintain so expensive a courtesan on his own: his presents were not competitive with those of Thraso. Gnatho's proposal seems outrageous not because it is inconsistent with the nature of the courtesan's trade, which of course it is not. It is rather that it undercuts the logic of the gift and its connection with friendly sentiment, which was the basis for expecting that a courtesan might bestow her favors for love's sake. Gnatho has converted Thais's operation (without asking her consent, it must be noted) into a business, in which Thraso will foot the bills and Thais will be free to carry on a dalliance with Phaedria, ostensibly for purely erotic motives though in fact Phaedria's and Chaerea's father will henceforward act as her patron. The economic underpinning of the gift has been revealed, exposing, if one likes, the paradox that informs any conception of gift-giving. But in the hands of Menander and Terence, the tensions implicit in the regime of gift-giving are manifested in ways that correspond to the economic ideologies of classical Athens and Rome, in which the fiction of love in return for gifts provided a necessary camouflage to the social role of the courtesan.

Notes

- 1 Thus, Derrida (1997: 131) writes: "For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other *gives me back* or *owes me* or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift"; this is the ground of "the impossibility or double bind of the gift." So too, Bourdieu (1997: 231) declares: "The major characteristic of the experience of the gift is, without doubt, its ambiguity. On the one hand, it is experienced (or intended) as a refusal of self-interest and egoistic calculation, and an exaltation of generosity – a gratuitous, unrequited gift. On the other hand, it never entirely excludes awareness of the logic of exchange or even confession of the repressed impulses or, intermittently, the denunciation of another, denied, truth of

generous exchange – its constraining and costly character.” These are fine insights, as far as they go, but neither leaves a space for the way these paradoxical qualities find specific determination in different cultures. The inspiration for much modern work on gifts as a form of exchange is Mauss 1923–24. For an overview of the influence of Mauss’s study with special reference to classics, see Carosso 2009. Contrast Raccanelli (2009: 312): “Il dono, potremmo concludere, è l’espressione simbolica della relazione: ciò che passa in un interscambio di doni, la posta in gioco, non consiste tanto in oggetti o contenuti (il dono cioè non ha valore di scambio), ma piuttosto in proposte di legami, ovvero, in ultima analisi, nell’offerta e nella negoziazione dell’immagine di sé e del partner che ciascuno degli interagenti di volta in volta intende proporre.”

- 2 For further discussion of the shifting boundary between gifts as a self-interested form of exchange and altruistic donations, see the excellent chapter by N. Coffee in this volume. The present chapter may be read as complementary to Coffee’s.
- 3 For a detailed defense of this interpretation of the passage in Aristotle, see Konstan 2006: 156–68.
- 4 I may note that the above discussion of the passage in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* differs substantially from the interpretation I offered in my book *Friendship in the Classical World* (Konstan 1997: 78–82).
- 5 There is an exception in the case of a novice courtesan, who was eligible to marry her first lover since she had no previous experience with another man; in this instance, the woman invariably proved to be a citizen and hence could marry her lover.
- 6 I have discussed this play in some detail in Konstan 1995: 131–40, to which the reader is referred for a full bibliography.
- 7 On gift-giving in the context of marriage and the Roman prohibition on such exchanges, see Coffee’s chapter in this volume.
- 8 For discussion and references, see Konstan 1995: 138–40.

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Further Reading

A good place to begin the study of gift-giving in classical antiquity is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8–9 (on friendship and love), and more especially Seneca's treatise, *De beneficiis* or *On Benefactions*, in seven books, and best consulted in the translation by M. Griffin and B. Inwood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The nature of the economy of classical Greece and Rome is a subject of ongoing debate, with some arguing that it was embedded in social relations generally (see Finley 1999), whereas others maintain that it constituted an independent sphere of behavior, much as in modern societies (see Cohen 1992). On gifts and relations of marriage, see Lyons 2003. More generally, see Hasel 2006; Kurke 1991. On gifts and friendship, see Verboven 2002.

Without Patronage: Fetishization, Representation, and the Circulation of Gift-Texts in the Late Roman Republic

SARAH CULPEPPER STROUP

Nam ceterae neque temporum sunt neque aetatum omnium neque locorum: haec studia adulescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solacium praebent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur. (Cicero *Arch.* 16)

For other pursuits are applicable to neither all circumstances, nor all ages, nor all locales. But these pursuits nourish our youth, comfort our maturity, enrich our successes, provide comforting refuge to our tragedies, delight us at home, smooth our path in the world, keep us company at night, are our partners in travel, and share our campfires. (my translation)

Introduction

In his defense of the poet Archias, delivered in 62 BCE, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) states that literary studies – the production, consumption, and circulation of texts – are to be valued apart from, if not above, other pursuits suitable for an elite male. At first, it appears an innocuous enough claim, and one likely naturalized by at least a certain population of modern readers, if perhaps not reflected in the current tides of academia or public opinion. And yet the claim that literary activity, and most specifically the material product of such activity (that is to say, *books*), is of equal value to the traditional *studia* (“pursuits”) of oratory and politics is one that, in 62, would have sounded decidedly odd coming from the mouth of Rome’s chief orator and statesman.¹ Even odder, however, than Cicero’s claim that literature is especially laudable because it produces books is the implication

that books are especially valuable because, under certain circumstances – depending on its content, its appearance, its age, its function as an object of collection, pre-station, or display – a book may function as, and therefore effectively become, *more than just a book*.

In the opening sections of Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the author races us through an imaginary bookstore in which every volume is defined in terms of its relation to a potential consumer. Books of History, Philosophy, Literature, Science, Poetry, and Biography are thus transformed into Books You Haven't Read, Books You Needn't Read, Books Made for Purposes Other Than Reading, Books That If You Had More Than One Life You Would Certainly Also Read But Unfortunately Your Days Are Numbered, and so on.² To this list we might add a category missing from Calvino's catalogue, but one of crucial importance to the present study, *Books for Giving to Someone*.

For of all of the social, intellectual, and affective categories of a book – of all the things a book might “be” to a reader – it is when a book is given and received, when a book is transformed by the act of giving from “book” to “gift,” that the book transcends its otherwise commercial or intellectual value and becomes something else entirely. No longer merely a book, it becomes a material expression of social contract; a stand-in for the physical presence of the giver;³ an “object of affection” that may initiate, confirm, reinforce, or seek to heal a relationship between approximate (or ideally) social equals.

And when we give books *as gifts* – as culturally bound “objects of affection” rather than commodified products of intellectual or artistic effort – how do we do it? Techniques vary now, as they did in the late Republic (and for the purposes of this essay, this will designate the first half of the first century BCE). Modern “book givers” frequently inscribe gift-books (I have in mind books authored by someone other than ourselves)⁴ before such books are given, establishing a claim of ownership at the very moment the book moves from our own possession to that of another. Such inscriptions may be accompanied by a clever literary quotation (a volume of Cicero, for instance, inscribed with a line of Catullus), underlying the intellectual and affective alliance (whether in place or hoped-for) between giver and recipient, and extending this alliance to include both the author of the book given (Cicero) *and* that of the quotation inscribed (Catullus). And of course sometimes the most intimate inscription consists merely of two names and a date, all other details rendered unnecessary.⁵

Textual prestation in the late Republic – at least the sort with which this study is concerned – is a different, and frequently more complex, matter. Again, techniques undoubtedly varied, as did the social sphere (and expectations) in which the gift was given. We know, for instance, that ostensible social equals occasionally gave each other as gifts – and perhaps as jokes, perhaps as frivolities; the tone is often lighthearted – volumes authored by others.⁶ We similarly have evidence of a complex hierarchical system of literary patronage – more active in the Augustan and later periods, but in place in the Republic – in which a client might exchange self-authored poems “vertically” (that is, to a socially elevated patron) and thus not so much as a gift as a payment, in return for any manner of social favors, doubtless

including, but not limited to, invitations, introductions, and a general increase in social status.⁷ Finally, our evidence from the late Republic points to the existence of an isonomic, or “horizontal,” system, a system that functioned fully outside of a hierarchical patronage (thus the title of this chapter), and one in which men of the patronal class – or “Society of Patrons,” as I have come to call it – did not merely write literary works (and they did, and in great quantity), but dedicated and exchanged such works *qua gifts* with their social equals.⁸

Although even in antiquity the authors of the Greco-Roman world wrote extensively about the peculiarly social function of the gift – such references appear as early as the Homeric epics of the eighth century BCE, run throughout the tragedians of the fifth century BCE, and perhaps culminate in Seneca’s first-century CE treatise “On Beneficences” (*de Beneficiis*) – the most important modern work on the subject remains Mauss’s seminal study, *The Gift*, an investigation into the fundamental structures of gift culture in aboriginal cultures. Since Mauss, authors such as Godbout and Caillé, Hyde, and Schriff, among many others, have done much to expand our understanding of the function of the given (and received) object in its many guises, enlightening us to the pervasive ramifications of one of the most naturalized, and yet socially fraught, of human acts: the giving of a gift.

In terms of the overarching focus of this volume – that of the “gift” in antiquity – the textual world of the late Republic plays a remarkable role, for it is in this period that one of the most important gifts one could give was of the literary sort. First, it is in this period that we first see self-authored texts – from books of poetry, to philosophy, to rhetoric, to political theory – reciprocally exchanged by men of equal social status in significant quantity. Second, the late Republican phenomenon of the gift-book as “social object” is one that continues so forcefully and with such increasing momentum in our own day that it might be counted as the single most important contribution of the late Republic in terms of the daily social and intellectual experience of the contemporary Western world.⁹

The final part of this essay will present an overview of some of the techniques of the late Republican exchange of such gift-books, focusing primarily on the evidence provided by two of our best sources for such practice: the poet Gaius Valerius Catullus (circa 84–54 BCE) and Cicero, mentioned above.¹⁰ Before we get there, however, it will be useful to look to the origins and evolution of the book as a “social object.” For that, we shall need to move back in time, to the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods (fourth through second centuries BCE), and to the peculiar textual world that arose in the East after the fall of Athens as a powerhouse of intellectual and artistic production.

Fetishization: Hellenistic Libraries and Royal Theft

It has long been recognized that the Hellenistic period as a whole is marked by the centrifugation of political and social power from the core of Athens to the eastern and southern periphery of the Greek world. The establishment of new centers of power

and learning in, for example, Alexandria and Pergamon transformed not only the social and political structure of the Greek world but also the overarching nature of scholarship, study, and the collection, housing, and use of written materials throughout the Hellenistic Mediterranean. As written communication became an increasingly important tool in the transmission and circulation of intellectual activity, the book itself – not merely the intellectual product it contained but the material stuff of which it was composed – acquired a powerful new socioeconomic valence. The book, newly a mechanism through which to negotiate status, identity, and influence on a grand geographic and political scale, became in this period a strangely social object.

Private libraries, and even large-scale ones, had existed long before the Hellenistic period proper; indeed, the small-scale circulation and enjoyment of the written word *qua* written word (that is, not as a text recording an early lyric, choral, or dramatic performance) is likely to have been a commonplace among the *literati* by at least the late fifth century. Indeed the physical text (whether stationary *stele* – an upright, inscribed stone slab – or portable book roll), as well as the acts of reading it solicited, seems to have been imbued with identifiable, if limited, social and erotic functions almost as soon as writing itself the playing field of intellectual and aesthetic discourse.¹¹ Writing is figured a seduction (and sometimes, in fifth-century Athens as much as first-century Rome, an attack); reading is figured an act of surrender; and the book in particular is figured a strangely sexual thing. For whereas the reading of a public *stele* or inscribed sympotic vessel invites the passerby or guest to engage in a public and performative seduction, the book roll lures its reader into a private courtship between two (men) alone. Revealing its contents in a slow striptease, providing a shimmering contact-point of writer and reader, the book vacillates seductively between the world of thought and the world of stuff, between presence and absence. As Plato's Socrates may as well have asked at the beginning of *Phaedrus*: Is that a book roll beneath your *himation*, or are you just happy to see me?¹²

To a certain extent, and doubtless rightly, the innate intimacy of the early book has been attributed to the physical shape of the book roll itself, to the practice of the oral reading of written discourse, and to the deeply affective and socially exclusive settings in which early texts were most frequently crafted and shared. But in the Hellenistic period, the previously intimate eroticism of the privately circulated physical text is expanded and imbued with broader and more powerful social and political valences. As Pfeiffer noted some time ago (1968: esp. 87–104) it is this period that invents the Classics with all of the cultural and intellectual acts of fetishism that this implies. But it is also this period that invents, practically speaking, the text as such: for it is in this period we first see the physical book, *qua* original or authoritative version, become an object of increasing political and social interest.

The bibliophilic drive of the Ptolemaic dynasty of Alexandria is well documented. It is this dynasty that, in the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (reigned 367–283 BCE) or perhaps his son, Ptolemy II, conceived of what is perhaps the largest and most ambitious “book project” of all time: the establishment of the grand library at Alexandria, the first such institution – funded directly by the royal family – to engage aggressively in the procurement, organization, and cataloging, of a collection of

books beyond the country's borders. As such, the library became a Hellenistic center of scholarly research and publication. It is here that we may locate the origins of the modern canon; the creation of anthologies, hypotheses, glossaries; critical and authoritative editions; alphabetization; Greek accent-marking and early punctuation; and advanced literary criticism.

But perhaps the most gripping tale of Ptolemaic bibliophilia – this fetishization of the book as not merely a repository for intellectual product but a social object of inherent value – is to be found in an account of Galen, a medical writer of the second century CE. In his commentary on Hippocrates' *Epidemics*, Galen tells of a bold act of book theft – the functional opposite of giving; the “taking what has not been given” – on the part of Ptolemy III Euergetes (reigned 246–222). On the pretext of having copies made for the royal library, Ptolemy had summoned from Athens a collection of original Athenian editions of the three great tragedians of the fifth century. When the ships arrived from Athens, however, the extent of Ptolemaic bibliophilia – and indeed, of the social status of the book as a whole – was revealed:

[Ptolemy] gave [to the Athenians] a security deposit of 15 talents (90,000 drachmas) of silver and he took the [original] books of Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus on the pretext that he wished to copy them and would immediately return them safe. After producing a costly copy on the very finest quality of papyrus, he kept the books that he had received from Athens, and returned the copies he himself had produced, inviting [the Athenians] to keep the 15 talents and take for themselves the new volumes. (Galen *Commentarii in Hippocratis de Morbis Vulgaribus* [Hipp. Epidem.] 3; my translation)

As scholars, we know to raise our eyebrows at Ptolemy III Euergetes' arrogant confiscation of original texts at the Alexandrian docks, and uniformly condemn his theft of the official editions of the three tragedians given on loan from Athens (even if we may secretly admire his boldness, and quietly empathize with his desire to own “an original”).¹³ The theft was an egregious one, to be sure. But were it not for the royal and rabid bibliophilia of the Ptolemies – were it not for the creation of the library at Alexandria and all that this entailed – we would likely not have today the works of the tragedians. Or Aristophanes. Or Homer. Or Herodotus. Or Plato. We would lack the vast majority of classical texts we now use to reconstruct the past, as well as the foundations of modern scholarly research. But for the book as a social object – an object important enough to *give* and valuable enough to *steal* – we would live in a world that would look decidedly different.

Representation: The Book and the Citizen

But as much as the bibliophilic impulses of the Ptolemies did much to create virtually *ex nihilo* the field of study forever strangely marked as “classic,” its aggressive and large-scale acquisition and collection of books brought with it a second, similarly important but perhaps further-reaching, social and intellectual by-product: the small-scale collection and ostentatious display of books as indicators of upper-class-citizen status.

In what had been an ongoing and evolving aesthetics of citizen status-accoutrements – a process not restricted to but most traceable through funerary reliefs and vase paintings – the Hellenistic period marks a radical reconfiguration of the visual means through which upper-class men contest and advertise their identity.

In the archaic period, when upper-class (and, of course, male) status revolved considerably around an individual's ability to participate in, and gain renown through, the martial protection of the polis, funerary and sympotic representations of the upper-class male (many of the latter of which focus on heroic themes) are marked most frequently by the inclusion of a spear – *doros/doros* – or other martial paraphernalia.¹⁴ The representation of military paraphernalia continues in the classical period, especially on red-figure vases that seek to contrast the activities of the country (warfare) with those of the city (political activity), and those that continue to play with epic themes. But at around the turn of the fifth century BCE, a new visual marker of male-citizen status, especially of the citizen within the polis, enters the visual game. It is the speaker's staff – *baktēria* – used to help secure a fold of the *himation* under the armpit in order to free up the two hands required for the proper choreography of political address.¹⁵ The *baktēria* appears as an element of citizen dress on numerous sympotic vessels¹⁶ often “put to work” in scenes of monetary negotiation with, or seduction of, a courtesan¹⁷ (one hand is used to plead the case and another to offer money or grope), or in other scenes of revelry or copulation, in which two hands may well be needed.¹⁸

Spear and speaker's staff – the former representative of martial (and frequently mythological) battles, the latter of political ones, each marking upper-class accrual of status – are used in tandem, if rarely in the same painted scene, throughout the fifth century BCE and well into the fourth. But in the Hellenistic period, the implement of Greek manhood is reduced in size, and a new status marker is added to artistic vocabulary: representations of learning in general and the book roll, and relative literary paraphernalia, in particular.¹⁹ Zanker has discussed this phenomenon at length, and there is no need to replay his argument here (Zanker 1993: 188–97). What we see, in short, is that in the late-third and early-second centuries on the male citizen becomes increasingly visually “intellectualized,” choosing to have himself represented, usually on grave monuments, as a collector, displayer, and user of books. Thus, on a collection of *stelai* from this period typical of the Ionian coast (many of which are housed in the Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi in Ankara), individuals of all classes begin to be represented as members of the *intelligentsia*. These reliefs – there are some 20,000 of them in the Ankara museum, though only a handful are on display – are marked first and foremost by the conspicuous presence of large numbers of book rolls and writing implements (Zanker 1993: 190–93). Apparently ordinary citizens²⁰ begin to appear in the guise of scholars, philosophers, men of science, and the collectors and displayers of texts. In what is likely a trickle-down effect of regally “sanctioned” Hellenistic bibliomania, the bourgeoisie has decided that learning and its accoutrements are not only chic; they are the physical markers – and perhaps even “makers” – of civic status.

In Byzantium, by contrast, and in the period that just follows (late second century and into the first, essentially contemporary to the birth of textual interest at Rome), the representation of literary paraphernalia on funerary reliefs continues apace, appearing now for the first time on *stelai* of apparently more aristocratic citizens. Zanker notes that the traditional *Totenmahl* (funerary banquet) is transformed on these *stelai* into a kind of *Bildungsmahl* (intellectual feast) and expands, “tables and shelves are filled not with food, but rather food for thought: book rolls and writing implements” (Zanker 1996: 193). These funerary representations of the East mark, I think, a nascent sea-change in both the conceptualization of what it means to be an upstanding citizen and the accoutrements – the “tools or weapons,” we might say – through which that identification is visually indicated. Whereas before a good citizen was visually indicated by his ability to fight with valor (the spear) or speak with eloquence (the *baktēria*), in the Hellenistic period and beyond (examples from the Roman period abound; we need think only of the Pompeian “Sappho” or literary couple, or any one of numerous funerary statues from the Augustan and Imperial periods)²¹ such a citizen is designated increasingly by his (and, for the first time, *her*!) ability to read, to write, and to own – books.

It is one of the claims of this essay that the Republican period in general, and the Republican Society of Patrons in particular, worked as both a funnel for the textual impulses originating under the Hellenistic kings and as a catalyst for the subsequent and ever-expanding expressions of these impulses. In adopting and adapting an Eastern impulse for textual fetishization and representation, late Republican authors produce in their own “gift books” – whether of poetry or prose – a solid Roman pedigree for the book as a “social object.”

It is a pedigree that, as we know, the authors of the Augustan and Imperial periods found attractive and useful. And even if in these later periods the dedicated text functions more commonly as a token of hierarchical payment (for which we have much evidence) than as one of isonomic prestation (for which we have rather less), it is in the textual activity of the late Republic that the potential of the book as an object of social exchange was first fully realized.

Without Patrons: Language, Display, and Dedication in Republican Gift-Books

And so let us return to the late Republic and the flourishing textual culture – a culture that, in 62 BCE, allowed Cicero to praise literary pursuits above all others – by which it is marked. The characteristic techniques used by Catullus and Cicero in order to mark their gift-books (and in the case of Catullus, “book” means rather “a poem” or a “collection of poems”)²² as such and to set them apart from all other forms of writing are many.²³ In the final pages of this essay, however, I wish to discuss the two that perhaps most solidly mark the exchange of late Republican gift-books, and that proved to be the most influential on textual exchange in the Imperial period and beyond: first, the vocabulary used by each man to describe his writing; and second,

the ways in which each man fashioned his textual dedications as socially required responses to either direct requests or previously received textual gifts, underlying the notion of “equal reciprocity” that marked the exchanges of this period.

In terms of the linguistic choices of Catullus and Cicero, what we see in their writing – and most particularly their writing when they are *writing about writing* – is that each man takes great care in the words he uses to describe *when* he writes gift-texts; *what* he perceives as their social function; and *where*, materially speaking, he locates the words he intends to give.²⁴ Although it is doubtless the case that each man is simultaneously responding to, as well as helping to forge, a first-century literary *Zeitgeist*, the fact these two men – who clearly knew each other, but for which acquaintance we have but one seven-line record²⁵ – choose the same words and use them with the same cultural resonance gives us much to go on in terms of reconstructing the textual world as a whole.

Without getting into a complex discussion of Latin linguistics or the origins and evolution of the terms chosen, it will be enough to present these terms (the “when, what, and where”), the designations they held prior to the first century BCE (in which we see no strong evidence of such a specialized vocabulary), and the ways in which they are used by Catullus and Cicero in discussions of textual reciprocity. First, the “when.” Each of our authors designates the “time to write” – not merely the time spent writing but the time during which the production of writings intended to be exchanged is an expected or laudable activity – by the term *otium*. A term that had, in the middle Republic, designated variously “time to do something for [a social superior]” or “a bit of time for myself,” *otium* is often frequently and mistakenly taken to designate, in the late Republic, simple “leisure time”: time not at work in the Forum – and thus time potentially misspent in anti-civic sloth. The authors of the late Republic, however, imbue the term with a strongly ameliorative and distinctly textual valence.²⁶ Far from a time to do nothing, *otium*, used now to designate a kind of “active literary leisure” – the time to write, and therefore to enrich and serve the life of the mind – becomes the time to do the most important thing of all.

Second, the “what.” Again we see that each man favored the same term – *munus* – to designate the “gift-book,” the material, textual object that is traded reciprocally between social equals. *Munus*, a term that in the middle Republic is used to designate variously an act, a political office, a favor given or received, a responsibility, or a love-token – in a sense “an action performed or object given with the expectation of a return” – emerges in Catullus and Cicero as the designation most fittingly applied to a poem, a book, a dialogue, or indeed any object of isonomic textual exchange. Although the term – a term that carries, linguistically, the expectation of reciprocal exchange²⁷ – had long been applied to physical objects exchanged between individuals, it is only in the first century BCE that the term is applied to books exchanged between – given and received by – social equals.²⁸ It is in this period that the “book as *munus*” becomes a textual “gift of duty.”

Third, the “where.” While our authors designated the social function of the gift book by the term *munus*, they designated the physical object of a book thus

exchanged by the term *libellus*. *Libellus*, structurally the diminutive of the term for “book” (*liber*), is used in this period never merely (if ever) to designate a “little book” but rather to designate a *liber* – be it a brief collection of lighthearted poetry or a lengthy rhetorical treatise – that has, by virtue of its social function as an exchanged *munus*, moved out of the direct ownership of its author and into the broader world. For once a book has been given as a gift to one, it may potentially become an object to many.

And yet the development of a shared technical terminology used to defend the time spent writing, and to mark texts written for the purpose of isonomic reciprocal exchange, is not enough. The giving of one’s book as a gift – the transformation of book into gift-book; the transformation of *liber* into *libellus* – requires not merely that the book be received (there is little so damaging to a relationship as a gift rejected), but that the book be received in the social context of an ongoing cycle of reciprocal exchange. For such gift-books to function successfully, they must be imagined to respond to a prior gift or request, and to invite a future such gift in return.

In order to achieve this, our authors make use of two techniques that were especially socially powerful in the late Republic. The first is simple. Many gift-texts (and here I mean specifically those texts that are addressed or dedicated to a single recipient) refer to prior textual gifts,²⁹ stating clearly that the present compositions are meant as return gifts – *munera*. Other such gift-texts present themselves as the rehearsals or natural end-products of prior patronal-class literary or intellectual engagement,³⁰ thus giving, “as a gift,” a *mémoire* of the literary activity in which all were engaged. Such texts thus embody, replicate, and promote the very textual culture of which they are a product.

The second technique taps into the expectations of polite late Republican society as a whole. This technique brings to bear the weighty excuse of Roman social obligation. These authors have written and dedicated their texts not because they *want to*, not because they *presume to*, but, quite simply, because they have been asked, and asked repeatedly, to do just that. This technique, which I refer to as the “incessant request,” is further developed by the textual communities of the Principate and Empire, and becomes a core characteristic of the formal configuration of all later textual dedication, even when such dedication occurs in the context of hierarchical patronage. Catullus uses this technique to “give” a poem (c. 68b) that claims that writing is impossible for him at the moment: grief over the death of his brother has rendered the poet unable to compose an original piece, and so he can send a mere translation, from the Greek, of Callimachus’s *Coma Berenikes* (itself a poem of grief over loss, and clearly no small task to compose). Cicero, in turn, uses a version of this request throughout his private letters,³¹ and adapts this technique frequently in the introductory sections of his dedicated dialogues: the work he has written he has written not because he has an overwhelming desire to write, but because he cannot politely refuse the incessant request of the dedicatee – a patronal-class man, such as himself.³²

Whether such (presumably written) requests for dedicated literature formed a functional part of the process of late Republican textual exchange, or whether they

existed as rhetorical fictions alone, is difficult to say. Perhaps the process was a purely pragmatic, if somewhat disingenuous, one, with members of the Society of Patrons tacitly encouraged or expected to write and circulate such requests by way of giving advance notice for a dedication they hoped to be headed their way. Perhaps the process was one of genuine if casual generosity, providing one's friends, allies, and colleagues an ever-ready excuse to write, and an ever-open conduit to the patronal-class culture in which the only way to dedicate a text – the only way to publish one's writing, unless that writing should be the transcript of a forensic or political oration, or the record of a military campaign – was in direct response to the proverbial offer that one could not refuse.

In the late Republic, we might say, the only way to compose one's Roman voice, and one's Roman self, was to create a technical vocabulary through which such compositions would be recognized. The only way to publish such a voice, and such a self, was to construct these compositions as textual gifts – gift-texts – in ongoing dialogue with the textual gifts of one's social peers, past, present, and future. Those of us who write such texts today – those who write texts that stand ever outside of the economic book-trade; those who write primarily in order to contribute to the textual world from which we have taken so much – understand this well.

It is when the book has become more than a book – when it has become an object of envy, of fetishization, of theft, of representation, of negotiation, of affection, and, above all, of *prestation* – that the book has become the book, and the gift, as we know it.

Notes

- 1 Cicero's discomfort in advancing the argument in such terms is apparent throughout the speech, but especially in the earliest sections: *patiamini de studiis humanitatis ac litterarum paulo loqui liberius, et in eius modi persona, quae propter otium ac studium minime in iudiciis periculisque tractata est, uti prope nouo quodam et inusitato genere dicendi* (*Arch.* 3); “[that you] suffer me to speak rather freely on the matter of literary and cultural pursuits, and – in the character of one who, due to his literary engagement, has virtually no experience in the strife of the court – to make use of a virtually new and unexpected manner of speaking.”
- 2 Taken loosely from Calvino's bookstore list in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, 1981: 5–6.
- 3 Thus Pliny the Younger writes to his wife Calpurnia: *C. Plinius Calpurniae suae s(alutem). scribis te absentia mea non mediocriter adfici unumque habere solacium, quod pro me libellos meos teneas, saepe etiam in uestigio meo colloces* (*Ep.* 6.7), “Caius Plinius to his Calpurnia, Greetings. You write that you are grievously afflicted by my absence, and have as your only solace *the ability to hold my books in my stead, and to frequently even place them in the depression I have left on the bed.*”
- 4 This is not to say that those who write books do not also give such books as gifts (and indeed, this is a sort of giving that is rather more in line with the focus of this chapter); but in terms of discussing a modern act of dedication and inscription, it is better to keep in mind the sort more frequently – and easily – performed.

- 5 The nearly pervasive, but undeniably curious, habit of inscribing a personal dedication on the flyleaf of a gift-book is one Fadiman addresses with acute humor in her essay "Words on a Flyleaf" (Fadiman 1998: 5–62). In a relationship of established or hoped-for intimacy, Fadiman notes, "the flyleaf becomes a 4"×6" playing field on which dreams, expectations, and regrets are negotiated with utmost care. In looking around for comparatively inscribed gifts, we find our closest parallels in jewelry (wedding rings, locket, pocket watches) or writing paraphernalia (pens, desk accessories)."
- 6 So Catullus. c. 14, a poetic response to Calvus's gift of particularly loathsome poetry. The distichs at Martial *Epigrams* 14.185–93, written as "gift tags" on volumes of classical literature, may well suggest such prestation, but the nature of *Epigrams* XIV, the so-called *Apophoreta*, is rather too complex to take at face value.
- 7 For a fine definition of patronage in antiquity, see Saller 1989: 49; major studies in Roman patronage include Brunt 1965, Deniaux 1993, Dixon 1993, Gold 1982 and 1987, Tatum 1997, White 1978 and 1993, and the edited collection of Wallace-Hadrill 1989. On the relationship of hierarchical patronage to the system of isonomic book prestation as discussed in this chapter, see Stroup 2010: 8–12.
- 8 For a general discussion of the term "Society of Patrons" – what I mean by the term, how such a "society" may have functioned – see Stroup (2010: 7) – 12; for a far from complete list of likely participants in this group, see the Appendix of this work, pp. 274–90.
- 9 Although the painstaking process of dedicatory inscriptions described above is likely one restricted primarily to members of a certain socioeconomic and educational status (and we would say the same for all of our ancient evidence), the vast proliferation of books marketed as "Gift Books," "Coffee Table Books," "Display Books," as well as the phenomenon of faux books, *éditions de luxe*, and ready-made book collections (e.g., Easton Press's *The 100 Greatest Books Ever Written*), speaks to a more socioeconomically pervasive influence.
- 10 On the necessity of reading Catullus and Cicero – one man a poet who, for all we can tell, did not pursue public office and never published any prose works, the other man an orator and statesman, who wrote copiously in almost every imaginable genre – in concert on this topic, see Stroup 2010: 3–7.
- 11 On this see especially Svenbro 1993: 187–216, on vase inscriptions of the early fifth century, in which the writer of the inscription is figured as the active sexual partner (*erastēs*) and the reader the passive (*eromenos*). Svenbro also discusses the category of "schoolboy" vases, in which young men are depicted, with various degrees of eroticization, in the act of reading (*Corpus vasorum antiquorum*, [Adolphseck, Schloss Fasanerei] 16.2, no. 62 is perhaps the most famous example).
- 12 Pl., *Phdr.* 228D. This passage is discussed usefully by Svenbro 1993: 198–201.
- 13 The tale of Euergetes' act of derring-do may also be found in Galen 17 (1) 607. Green 1990: 87–91 discusses the project of the library's planned acquisition of every known work and remains an invaluable source for the political and intellectual background of the Hellenistic period.
- 14 The examples of this type are too numerous to list in full; representative are the stele of Aristion, circa 510–500 BCE, in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens (funeral stele no. 29), the black-figure amphora signed by Exekias and depicting a battle between Achilles and Penthesilea (BM 1836.2–24.127; Vase B 210), and the amphora showing Ajax and Achilles playing draughts, also by Exekias (though many versions of this theme exist), circa 550–540 and in the Vatican museum, no. 16757.

- 15 Some of the earliest sculptural examples of this are the stele from Orchomenos by Alexenor, circa 500–490 and in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens (funeral stele no. 39), and the Kouros base representing youths at play, circa 510, National Archaeological Museum at Athens, no. 3476.
- 16 Cf. Toledo, Ohio 64.126 (kylix), Brussels R 259 (same, by Scheurleer painter), and West Berlin F2279 ARV 115,2 (kylix by Peithnios).
- 17 Cf. Rome, Villa Giulia 27254 (kylix), Chicago 1911.456 ARV 572,88 (hydria by the Leningrad painter), Adolphseck 41 ARV 566,6 (pelike by Pig painter).
- 18 Cf. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University ARV 24,14 (cup by Phintias), London E 68 ARV 371,24 (kylix by Brygos painter), London E 44 ARV 318–9 (kylix, Panaitios painter), and Würzburg 479 ARV 372,32 (kylix, Brygos painter).
- 19 It is true that the book roll appears in some earlier depictions, such as the funeral stele of a youth, circa 420, now in an abbey in Grottaferata; but such depictions do not gain broad currency until the third century and later. Although depictions of book rolls always retain minority status on Attic vases, they do appear; see Immerwahr 1964 and 1973.
- 20 The majority of the *stelai* in Ankara are of relatively low quality, somewhat rudely carved, and, based on the runs of almost identical “types,” likely premade rather than carved-to-order. These are obviously not the funerary *stelai* of the poorest members of society, nor are they those of the very upper class.
- 21 The so-called Sappho portrait, Naples 9084, depicts a young woman with writing tablet in hand and stylus rested suggestively on her lips; the provincial “literary couple,” Naples 9058, depicts what is likely a nonaristocratic duo “done up” in aristocratic manner: like “Sappho,” the woman holds tablet in hand and stylus to mouth; the man is togate, with a book roll held just under his somewhat scraggly beard. From the Augustan period, a funerary statue (now in Buffalo, at the Albright Knox Gallery) of a man with chest exposed and book roll in hand speaks to a literary chic of the period. Zanker 1993: 214–15 identifies the individual as a professional poet (“a member of the aristocracy could hardly have had himself so depicted”), but this is an identification I feel we should not make too hastily; cf. the statue of Posidippus with the head reworked (after circa 50 BCE) into that of a Roman senator (Vatican museums; see Zanker 1993: 211).
- 22 What we have received as the so-called Catullan *libellus* (a term to be discussed below), a collection of some 116 poems in addition to some fragments, comes to us by way of a postclassical arrangement. That the *libellus* was never given or published as such in antiquity seems, *pace* Thomson 1997: 9, clear; on the various arguments on collection and arrangement, Thomson 1997: 6–11 provides a good survey.
- 23 In addition to vocabulary and dedication, discussed below, we might easily include the encapsulation or rehearsal of public display in the exchanged text, the aggressive “materialization” of the text as a whole, and the personification of gift-texts as friends or children.
- 24 In what follows, I am following the basic argument and structure of my argument at Stroup 2010: 33–109.
- 25 Although Catullus c. 49, addressed to Cicero, is our sole witness that the men knew each other (the latter never mentions the former by name, and later references to the “new poets” postdate Catullus’s death by some ten years, making such identification unlikely), the fact that they ran in many of the same social circles and shared several close friends makes their acquaintance clear. Thomson 1997: 323 and 1967: 225–30 and Laughton 1970: 1–7 have suggested that the poem is written as a response-piece to a poem offered by Cicero, however, and I am inclined to agree.

- 26 For this “textualizing” use of *otium* and its derivatives in Catullus, see esp. cc. 50 and 51; for Cicero’s ameliorative use of the term, see, e.g., *Brutus* 2.8; *Off.* 1.69; and *Fam.* 7.33.2. A fuller discussion of this term and its use by Catullus and Cicero may be found at Stroup 2010: 37–65.
- 27 On *munus* in earlier Latin texts, see Zagagi 1982 and 1987; for a discussion on *munus* as the textual “gift of duty,” see Stroup 2010: 66–100.
- 28 Thus, see Catullus c. 14, of Calvus’s playful *munus* of a collection of substandard poets; for the textual *munus* in Cicero, see, e.g., *Brutus* 4.15, *Off.* 3.1.4 and 3.33.121, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.
- 29 So Catullus c. 14 is a direct response to Calvus’s gift of substandard poetry; Cicero presents his dialogic *Brutus* as a response to an early textual gift Brutus had sent him; in his letters to Atticus, Cicero discusses nervously the textual gift he should repay to Varro in exchange for the dedication of the first books of *De lingua latina*.
- 30 So Catullus c. 50 records and responds to an evening of poetic play between himself and Calvus; virtually all of Cicero’s dialogues are fashioned as records of prior discourse.
- 31 Consideration of ancient epistolography, perhaps the gift-text genre bar none, is not included in the current study, in large part because Cicero is our only source for this habit in the late Republic.
- 32 Thus in *De oratore*, dedicated to his brother Quintus, Cicero claims that he writes in response to Quintus’s frequent (*saepe*, 1.2.5) requests to write; *Brutus* similarly posits a request for writing (*quidnam id? inquam. ut scribas, inquit, aliquid*, “‘Whatever do you want?’ I said. ‘That you write something,’ he responded.” *Brut.* 19); the highly theatrical *Laelius de amicitia* reminds Atticus, the dedicatee, that he had frequently (*saepe*, 4) asked that he write something on the topic of friendship.

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Further Reading

On the literary and cultural developments of the Hellenistic Age, see Pfeiffer 1968, especially the later chapters, and Green 1990, who provides an excellent introduction to the period as a whole.

On gift culture, Mauss's seminal work (1990) remains a good starting point, and may be profitably supplemented by the works of Godbout and Caillé 1998, Hyde 1983, Schrift 1997, and Weiner 1992, esp. chapter 1. On postclassical bibliophilia, in addition to Fadiman 1998, see Frese and O'Keeffe 1997, Jackson 2001, and Muller 2000 (an Italian translation of the original French); Connery's work (1998) on the textual cultures of Imperial China is similarly helpful (and shows a great deal of parallel with what we see in the late Republic). Kopytoff 1986 provides an excellent introduction to the notion of commoditization; Amariglio and Callari 1993 provide a useful discussion of equal and unequal exchange in a system of commodity fetishism.

The bibliography on Catullus and Cicero is extensive. On the former, Wiseman 1985 provides a good introduction to the poet and his time; Skinner's edited volume (2007) provides an assortment of articles that focus on specifics of biography, style, and rhetoric. On the latter, see Dugan 2005 on Ciceronian self-fashioning and May's edited volume (2002) for an assortment of readings.

Roses and Violets for the Ancestors: Gifts to the Dead and Ancient Roman Forms of Social Exchange

NICOLA DENZEY LEWIS

From the earliest times the Roman looked upon his dead relations as in some sense living, lying beneath the earth, but capable alike of returning to the world above and of influencing in some vague way the fortunes of the living, especially in relation to the crops which sprung from the ground in which they lay. At first, when his religion was one of fear, he regarded the dead as normally hostile, and their presence as something to be averted; this is the stage which gave birth to the Lemuria. As civilisation increased, and the sense of the unity of household and community developed, fear, proving ungrounded, gave place to a kindlier feeling of the continued existence of the dead as members of household and state, and even in some sense as an additional bond between the living: this is the period which produced the *sacra privata* and the Parentalia. When the *numen*-feeling began to pass into that of *deus* ... a connection was felt between the spirits of the dead and the deities of the earth associated with the growth of the crops. ... Lastly, the same kind of feeling which added Parentalia to Lemuria developed the vague general notion of the Di Manes, not the deified spirits of the dead, but peaceful and on the whole kindly divinities holding sway in the world of dead spirits, yet accessible to the prayers of the living. The dead, then, were not themselves worshipped, but they needed commemoration and kindly gifts, and they had in their lower world deities to whom prayer might be made and worship given. (Bailey 1907: 57)

More than a century ago, the Roman historian Cyril Bailey penned this explanatory account of Roman domestic religion.¹ Like any good thinker of his day, Bailey turned to evolutionary models to explain the origin of the Roman “cult of the dead.” The magical universe of the “primitive” originally reflected childlike thinking, where the dead under the earth were associated with the emergent crops. Primitives are, of course, fear-driven in nineteenth-century anthropology, but the

gradually soothing influence of civilization and community helped to channel that uncontrolled fear into controlled ritual behaviors: the development of cult. As primitives, now banded together under the force of culture, transformed their experience of *numen* into the more evolved awareness of *deus*, the link between the dead and the fertility of the land remained powerful, germinating a host of chthonic deities from Ceres and Proserpina to the *di manes*, the Roman spirits of the dead.

Overall, Bailey viewed these emergent social relations between Romans and their dead as congenial, a sort of gentleman's contract between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. Any gentleman's contract requires reciprocity, and Bailey found it here in the prayers and gifts offered not to the dead themselves but to their intangible proxies, the *di manes*. In return for these gifts, the dead would continue after death in the same social roles that they inhabited before their death: beneficent ancestors, not dangerous anonymous shades to be placated. Prayers and gifts kept the dead civilized.

In 1923, Marcel Mauss published *The Gift*, in which he argued that gifts, or "prestations," represented a potent medium for human relationship; never freely given, the prestation demanded, however implicitly, a counterprestation. This opportunity for reciprocity lay at the heart of human social exchange. But gifts *to the dead* constitute a particular thorny problem for Mauss's theory of prestations, as we see also from Karen Stern's wonderful essay in this volume on graffiti as gifts to the dead at Beth She'arim. If every gift is inherently coercive and thus presupposes – no, implicitly demands – reciprocity, what do the dead give back? Bailey's account of the Roman "cult of the dead" – sixteen years before the publication of *The Gift* – furnished, presciently, one possible answer: the dead provide a boon for the living, ensuring the fertility of the earth even as they continue their benevolent relations with those who honor them with "kindly gifts." But is this abstract boon really a counterprestation in the Maussian sense? I argue here that it is not. Mauss had in mind material gifts and countergifts, which in turn presume that two parties act as agents. One cannot have a Maussian theory of exchange with the dead, since the dead are incapable of providing counterprestations. Mauss's theory is, in this particular case, self-limiting. However, there are ways in which Mauss's theory of the gift provides us with a useful theoretical frame to consider Roman practices of gift-giving to the dead.

I begin this essay with a reference to Bailey's work because when it comes to theorizing Roman gifts to the dead, in general, historians have not kept pace of anthropological insights into various forms of social praxis, including (and in this case combining) practices of gift-giving and mortuary or funerary practices. While contemporary historians would quickly reject Bailey's evolutionary framework, a key element of his analysis is consistently reflected in scholarship today: the insistence that Romans, after death, continued in social relationships with the living. This essay represents a first step toward retheorizing these social relationships.

My argument here depends on a series of steps. Most crucially, I argue that to understand ancient Roman practices of offering grave gifts, we must first divorce social practice from afterlife belief. This call has already been made but has not yet

been widely heeded in the field of Roman history (Morris 1992). Romans did not give gifts to the dead because they believed the dead benefited from them; a counterprestation was neither expected nor received. Nevertheless, I argue that practices of giving gifts to the dead perdured for their recursive, symbolic quality: a gift to the dead could either redefine or reinscribe social relations among the living.

Roman Death and Gifts to the Dead

Roman views of the dead ranged widely and elegantly across a spectrum, from dismissal to deep concern (e.g., Cumont 1959). Roman cults of the dead – the plural here is preferable to a totalizing concept of *cult* – impinged on manifold aspects of Roman daily life, directing domestic and civic ritual, shaping the ways that time was marked and that the living went about daily lives.

For the purposes of this essay, I will confine my analysis to evidence from the city of Rome from the first three centuries of the Common Era, with comparative examples drawn in from outside Rome only when useful. Rome itself presents a particularly vexing area for analysis, however, in that its continuous habitation has ensured that no single cemetery has remained intact for full archaeological analysis. Consequently, the evidence for Roman gifts to the dead is likely more arid than it might have been in Roman antiquity. Nevertheless, the evidence for offerings to the dead remains abundant, despite the characterization of ancient Romans as pragmatists who considered the dead to be, to paraphrase Lucretius, no concern of theirs (“Death is nothing to us and no concern of ours,” *De rerum natura* 3.830 ff.).

I will return to the issue of ritual at the conclusion of this essay, but for the time being I want to restrict my analysis to the objects embedded within ritual structures: things that we might plausibly call gifts to the dead. For the purposes of this essay, I suggest that four categories of such gifts emerge from Roman literary and archaeological sources:

- (1) gifts thrown upon the funeral pyre to be burned with the corpse;
- (2) grave goods from everyday life deposited with the corpse or cremated remains;
- (3) food offerings and libations left on the pyre/grave or poured into the grave through libation tubes specially provided for this purpose;
- (4) dedicated objects (nails, amulets, figurines, and so on) left in the grave for apotropaic or necromantic purposes.

In most instances, evidence for these gifts is difficult to come by; in the case of the first category, the gift is cremated and thus known from fairly rare literary attestations and archaeological analysis of funerary ash. In the case of the third category, food offerings, like the body, decay or are consumed by vermin; in the case of the fourth, such objects could remain indefinitely in the tomb if they were there for apotropaic purposes, but might be removed to be used by the living for necromantic purposes.

In all cases, the exigencies of the material or archaeological record further complicate matters: tombs are plundered and spoliated, their contents moved, wrecked, or lost; archaeological records are not kept meticulously; and so on. Finally, Roman practices of gifting the dead also varied by place, ethnic group, and epoch, as well as according to various social factors such as age, gender, or social status of the deceased. What I have presented here is therefore a preliminary or working typology, derived from a broad view of our surviving evidence. After further description, I will have occasion to comment further on the usefulness of these categories.

Funerary Gifts

Following Greek custom, Romans up until the third century CE conventionally cremated their dead (Cic. *Leg.* 2.22.56; Plin. *NH* 7.187; Morris 1992: 31–69). This disposal method of the dead was strictly regulated and professionalized, and most likely confined to the wealthy (Nock 1932; Toynbee 1971; Jones 1981; Bodel 2000). Such funerary displays were public, with *ustrina* or cremation pyres in visible locations just beyond the city walls.² According to the poet Statius (45–96 CE), elaborate and costly gifts called *arsura* were placed on the funerary pyre to be consumed along with the body (*Theb.* 6.126). At elite or imperial funerals, cups of oil, ornaments, clothes, dishes of food, and other things theoretically agreeable to the deceased were also consigned to the flames (Verg. *Aen.* 6.225; Lucan 9.175). Animals or pets were sometimes sacrificed at the pyre (Walker 1985: 57); during the archaic period, even captives and slaves had been tossed in (Walker 1985: 57). Gladiatorial fights were developed initially as funerary “offerings” to the dead (Hopkins 1983: 3–5); according to Servius, a late interpreter of earlier Roman custom, these gladiators were called *bustuarii*, those of the *bustum* or pyre (*Ad Virg. Aen.* 10.519).

Grave Goods

Literary evidence suggests that Roman elites were buried with copious amounts of funerary gifts (*dona feralia*).³ Archaeological support from Rome itself is less forthcoming, given the widespread looting of ancient graves since antiquity. In marked contrast to literary evidence, however, grave goods inside intact Roman tombs tend to be spare, limited to small vessels for perfumes and modest jewelry. We have more detailed evidence from the provinces, particularly Roman Britain, where large-scale professional excavation of Romano-British cemeteries confirms that grave gifts were indeed rare. One study revealed that in nine of ten such cemeteries, fewer than one percent of graves had grave gifts, and those were limited to a few small items: coins, glass and pottery vessels, beads, dress items, or sometimes hobnail boots (Quensel-von-Kalben 2000: 218–19). We can infer from the very rare presence of luxury grave goods (styluses, silk garments, and brooches) that the deceased buried with these had a prominent place in their community (Quensel-von-Kalben 2000: 223).

In Rome itself during this period, children received proportionally more grave gifts, including feeding bottles, dolls, even pets. In Roman Britain, children's graves had fewer gifts than adult graves as a whole, but there were regional differences (Quensel-von-Kalben 2000: 220). There were also regional variations in the comparative amount of grave goods deposited in women's graves, but they are generally modest (Quensel-von-Kalben 2000: 220); there was no significant variation in the number of goods found in women's graves, compared to men's graves.

There is one interesting exception to the dearth of Roman grave gifts, particularly valuable ones. A series of otherwise unconnected burials for unmarried girls between the ages of five and twenty reveals a remarkable consistency in the style of burial and nature of grave gifts (Martin-Kilcher 2000). One such burial contained a third-century mummy of an eight-year-old girl from Rome's Via Cassia; she is now on display at Palazzo Massimo along with her substantial grave goods, which include amber jewelry from Southeast Asia and her carved ivory doll. The third-century grave of the freedwoman Crepereia Tryphaena, who died at thirteen on the eve of her wedding, contained (among other things) her engagement ring, her nuptial robe and wreath, and her doll. Still, such sumptuously appointed burials are unusual for Rome: under ordinary circumstances, Romans did not deposit transferable wealth such as valuable jewelry in the grave (Oliver 2000: 115–24).

Food Offerings

A third category of gift is offerings of food (*cibus*, *esca*, *edulia*) at the grave: bread, wine and grapes (*vinum*, *escae vindemiales*), cakes (*liba*), and sausages. These were placed in holes in graves through feeding tubes or pipes (Calza 1940: 44; Hopkins 1983: 211). In Rome, as in Greece, a supper (Latin: *silicernium*; Greek: *deipnon*) or meal was carried out graveside, where toasts were also made in honor of the deceased (Dunbabin 2003: 103–40; Jensen 2008). These funerary meals included bread, heated wine, fish, and occasionally meat. The living benefited most tangibly from these feasts: indigents were known to consume the food left graveside (Cic. *Leg.* 2.22.55; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 16.4.4; Juvenal 5.85).

Dedicated Objects

Votive offerings or dedicated objects are a common, but underrecorded, form of grave goods (Osborne 2004). In this case, items deposited in or around the grave are “gifts” for the dead, but only in the sense that they either exploit or reflect the power of the dead. In Rome, these sorts of offerings included spell or curse tablets (*defixiones*), nails, animal teeth, wax effigies, and human hair. Coins left in the grave may similarly have served a “magical” function (Stevens 1991). Bells to ward away spirits or the evil eye were left in children's graves, a practice that continued well into the Christian period (Nuzzo 2000: 252–53). A class of miniature objects

known as *crepundia* (from Latin *crepare*, “to rattle”) served an amuletic function for children who carried them with them while alive; their presence in graves may indicate that their use continued into death (cf. Martin-Kilcher 2000: 66–67). As a whole, these objects appear to have functioned to appease, contain, or keep away either the dead or baleful beings that lurked around graves. In some cases, these offerings were explicitly necromantic, used to exploit the malevolent power of those who had died a violent or untimely death.⁴

Rethinking the Grave Gift

The Roman cult of the dead has been severely undertheorized, and thus so far my intention has been to describe and categorize forms of gifting the dead. Some analysis is now in order. One might begin by asking on what basis I have chosen to call any of these objects burned on the pyre, buried with the dead, or fed to the dead “gifts.” The question is a fair one, and despite the Latin term for such objects as *dona*, “gifts,” the range of objects and their attendant reasons for placement along with a corpse makes the question a pressing one. Archaeologists, notably, prefer the more neutral term “grave good” to “grave gift,” to highlight that we indeed cannot be sure if these were intended as gifts at all. Let us consider my first category of “gift”: objects thrown on the funerary pyre. The archaeologist and art historian Susan Walker lists the personal effects of one Sextus Julius Aquila of Andemantunnum (Langres, France) that he ordered to be cremated with him; these included hunting nets, spears, swords, traps and snares, his sedan chair, rush-boat, and medicines (Walker 1985:14). In every case, these were Aquila’s own possessions, cremated by his own request as specified in his will. Were these, then, “gifts”? The same can be said of a deceased’s hobnail boots or jewelry placed in a grave. Are they gifts? What about the third category of food offerings? These, too, are difficult to classify as “gifts” in the Maussian sense; certainly they were in no way coercive, nor did they demand a countergift. Unlike other sorts of material goods that could be given away to the dead, a food offering was shared “equally” between the living who consumed it graveside and the dead. Finally, the fourth category remains problematic in that dedicated objects were not necessarily gifts for the dead at all; they were placed in the grave to ward off baleful influences, or to keep the dead in their place, or to be removed by a practitioner once they had absorbed power that emanated from a corpse, grave, or cemetery.

I included the fourth category because the presence of dedicated objects in graves allows us to most clearly witness, I argue, a different system of gifting: the exchange of material objects for supernatural returns (Osborne 2004). It is a category for which the return is uncertain (Gregory 1980), and which, to paraphrase Arjun Appadurai, the gift’s exchangeability (past, present, and future) for some other kind of thing becomes its most “socially relevant feature” (Appadurai 1986: 13). It may well be the case with dedicated objects that what is being exploited is the power believed to be harnessed from the performative act of creating, leaving behind, and/or using the object, rather than the dead’s direct

relationship with the object. This may explain why a single bone from a corpse contains as much necromantic power as a whole corpse (Walker and Lucero 2000); the symbolic system behind dedicated objects works not to recognize individual identities in the afterlife, but to draw on the collective (and fearsome) power of the dead. At any rate, in the dedicated object, a system of reciprocity between the living and the dead – albeit one that is indirect and symbolic – becomes more clearly visible than in the case of other objects generally classified as “grave goods.”

The Dead as Rational Actors

In modern historical studies, we consistently find the same explanation given for why Romans deposited funerary gifts: the dead were thought to still enjoy, in some manner, the things they found enjoyable during life. For example, the late Roman historian Keith Hopkins claimed that small things deposited in the tomb – dice and drinking cups, mirrors and cosmetics, boots, shoes and lamps for traveling, and toys for children – could make the dismal afterlife “more comfortable” (Hopkins 1983: 229). Food gifts were given simply because the dead liked good food, drink, and the chance to celebrate (Walker 1985: 11).⁵ As for why Romans might have thrown objects onto a funerary pyre, the standard answer, again, is that the dead were able to enjoy the offerings made in their honor (e.g., Jashemski 1970: 99).

This modern notion that the Roman dead enjoyed their “gifts” is a curious one, because it is completely unsupported by both literary sources and modern anthropological work on grave depositions and assemblages. The satirical writer Lucian of Samosata composed in the second century CE a series of short pieces lampooning both Greek and Roman funerary practices, including the offering of gifts, the slaughter of horses, lovers, and slaves upon the grave, and the burning and burial of clothing and jewelry, as if these might have had some use for the deceased. In one of Lucian’s satirical pieces, the ferryman Charon and the god Hermes are deep in consternated debate. Charon rails against the stupidity and sentimentality of the cult of the dead:

Why, they are putting flowers on the stones, and pouring costly essences upon them! And in front of some of the mounts they have piled up branches and dug trenches. Look: there is a splendid banquet laid out, and they are burning it all, and pouring wine and mead ... into the trenches! What does it all mean?

Hermes replies:

What satisfaction it affords to their friends in Hades, I am unable to say. But the idea is that the shades come up and get as close as they can, and feed upon the savory steam of the meat and drink the mead in the trench. Eat and drink, when their skulls are dry bones? (Lucian, “*Charon*,” Fowler and Fowler 1905: 1.181–82)

Lucian's brusque dismissal of sentimentality (and hyperliteralization) over the dead echoes scores of Roman epitaphs such as this one:

We are nothing.
See, reader, how quickly
we mortals return
From nothing to nothing. (CIL 6.26003)

Also popular in the high Empire was the epitaph *non fui, fui, non sum, non curo*: "I was not, I was, I am not, I care not," which, as many classicists point out, was common enough in funerary inscriptions to be engraved merely in an abbreviated form: *Nff ns nc* (CIL 5.2283; 1813) (Lattimore 1942: 84; Hopkins 1983: 23; Warrior 2006: 40). It seems to me that we ought to take Romans at their word: the dead were in no position to benefit from gifts offered to them, let alone to reciprocate in any way. If, then, the Roman dead were thought to be truly dead – as Lucian and countless funerary inscriptions attest – not only must we dispense of the idea of a countergift, but even with the idea of a grave good being a "gift" at all. It is not an object *for* the dead, but an object *about* the dead.

Burial Rites and Afterlife Beliefs

Along with the modern misconception that grave gifts offered comfort to the Roman dead, we should also disavow ourselves of the assumption that the presence of grave goods correlates in any meaningful way with afterlife notions. Anthropology has revealed time and time again that in fact, they do not. I can offer here only one comparative example. The anthropologist Peter Ucko raises the instructive case of the Lugbara of Uganda (Ucko 1969: 262–80). Although the Lugbara bury their dead with conventional objects from daily life – a warrior with his quiver, or a woman with her grindstones – these were not meant for the dead to use. Like the Romans, the Lugbara have no particular concept of an afterlife. Ucko writes: "The tomb goods have no connection with the afterworld; they are simply the visual expressions of the person's social personality; the visible expression of his having left the living" (Ucko 1969: 265).

In the case of our Romans, I argue that grave goods were not offerings because the Roman dead *still felt*; rather, they were recursive offerings that, like those of the Lugbara, extended an individual's social identity into the "zone of unknowing" that is death. Thus offerings of a favorite drinking cup or piece of jewelry or toy ensured that the personality of the deceased – what made him or her distinctive and lovable – continued on. The issue is one of enduring social identity.

To give a more specific example, let me return to the case of Crepereia Tryphaena, the thirteen-year-old Roman girl found buried with her jewelry, an ivory doll, a spindle and distaff, and her *crepundia*. The victim of a cruelly disfiguring form of tuberculosis, she died on the cusp of her wedding, as her dress, nuptial wreath,

and engagement ring indicate. In many ways, the specificity of the goods buried with her served to extend her own identity beyond death; distinctive jewelry such as a large brooch and her engagement ring engraved with the name of her fiancé identified her. In other ways, her grave goods served predominantly as markers of her social identity, delineating her dual, liminal status as both child (doll and *crepundia*) and matron (spindle and distaff) (Martin-Kilcher 2000: 62; Denzey 2007: 1–9). As for their status as “gifts,” the distaff and spindles found in Crepereia Tryphaena’s grave, like others found in similar graves, were crafted of precious materials such as amber, jet, and glass, which would have precluded their actual use (Martin-Kilcher 2000: 64). Her doll, jointed and wired together and meticulously carved out of costly imported ivory, was similarly not a toy, but rather a ceremonial object. On the eve of a Roman girl’s marriage, she offered such a doll, along with her *crepundia*, to the gods, to mark her rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. If Crepereia Tryphaena’s “grave gifts” were for anyone, they were not for her; they were for them. Alternatively, these “gifts” were no longer gifts at all, but markers of Crepereia’s identity at the moment she passed from the realm of the living.

Redefining the *di manes*

So let us take stock of where we are. I argue that we must dispose of the outdated way of framing the presence of grave goods as if the Roman dead were not dead, able to still enjoy food, admire pretty trinkets, or take comfort from lamps, dolls, and boots. Indeed, I suggest we must divest ourselves of the idea that goods deposited in the tomb were properly “gifts” at all. In support of my assertion are a series of archaeological studies; these revise previous assumptions that grave goods such as food vessels or dolls had been removed from the deceased’s home only to be deposited in graves as gifts.

Archaeologists have found that Roman grave goods were never produced for actual use; the pottery vessels found on Roman funerary pyres and graves, for instance, differed markedly in shape from those used domestically and diurnally and were made exclusively for funerary use and sold at specialty stalls near *ustrina* (Polfer 2000:35; Tuffreau-Libre 2000: 53–54).

And yet one should not ignore the fact that the Roman practice of depositing things in graves existed. Thus we can conclude that although it is incorrect to say that grave goods were gifts, it may be accurate to say that Romans still made offerings graveside. Those modern scholars who take seriously the Roman disavowal of an afterlife but who also note the practice of making graveside offerings resolved the resultant cognitive dissonance by assigning new “proxy” recipients for these gifts: gifts to the dead were not precisely for the dead (who could not benefit from them) but for the *di manes*, a class of minor deities without formal cult but recognized, virtually without fail, on Roman tombstones with the formula *dis manibus*, “to the manes.” This approach is already evident in Bailey’s analysis, with which I opened this essay.

Unfortunately, this move only precipitates another vexing question: are the *manes* the same as the dead themselves? They did not have much of a cult; they were hardly well developed as an idea or as independent entities (Davies 1999: 146–47). Indeed, they show up in the historical record mainly in a reduced form, as merely the engraved superscription “DM” on the front of Roman epitaphs. Put differently, dedications to the *manes* functioned mostly as one of many things that were written on a gravestone in order to make a grave a grave, and we are probably wrong to afford them much of an independent or developed existence. In their presence as DM superscriptions, the *manes* form a shorthand for the Roman obsession with monumentalization of the dead, and nothing more. To ascribe more is our own interpretive slippage into presumed forms of animism and even assumptions of reciprocity, which the evidence itself does not clearly bear out. In over a century of research, we have not moved so very far from Cyril Bailey, when he notes that the Roman dead were not themselves worshipped, but that “they needed commemoration and kindly gifts, and they had in their lower world deities to whom prayer might be made and worship given.”

Leaving Mauss Behind

Let us return to Marcel Mauss. I believe it is fair to assume that although he provided us with the concept of the “total prestation” as, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss’s famously useful phrase, something to “think with,” it was not necessarily a theory that Mauss intended to have universal applicability. To ask “what, then, did the dead give back?” is perhaps an unfair way to press his theory. If Mauss’s concept of the gift and reciprocated counter-gift is to illuminate ancient Roman gift-giving to the dead, the kind of gift (as well as the kind of “counter-gift”) must be extended beyond material or commercial prestations into symbolic ones. This is to push past Mauss into the territory of Pierre Bourdieu and his theories of symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu 2010).

The Bourdieuan notion of symbolic capital, unlike Mauss’s self-limiting material prestation, allows the obvious connection to emerge between the Roman practice of giving offerings to the dead, on the one hand, and social status, on the other. Derek Counts, in a study of Roman embalming practices, notes that Romans controlled their own status through broadcasting new status distinctions for their loved ones’ burials. An exotic or elaborate assemblage of gifts elevated the social status of the deceased and granted a “certain distinction” to the family members who had engaged in a conspicuous act of gifting the dead. (Counts 1996: 201). The quality, frequency, and quantity of grave goods could act to socially differentiate between families; the disposition of gifts without promise of direct return publicly, and sometimes conspicuously, marked out wealth. Since wealth in Rome could not be earned but only gained through inheritance, dowry, or gift, the disposal of this wealth marked out the gift giver as socially advantaged. In this, the “counter-gift” to be received is symbolic capital: social prestige. The benefit of this prestige, furthermore, must have outweighed the financial disadvantage of disposing of moveable wealth.

In fact, the idea that what was indirectly received from a gift to the dead was a potentially higher status for the recipient is too simple. In the landscape of individuals vying for social power, there were other operative principles at work. For instance, Ovid specifies of the Parentalia that offerings for the dead should be small and inexpensive: a handful of violets, a sprinkling of grain or salt. These were to be placed on potsherds and left in the middle of the road. He thus contends against the elaborate status contest that was the Roman funeral and tomb.

We find a similar caveat against the potential status war that the cult of the dead might provoke in the rulings of the jurist Ulpian (170–228 CE): “Ornaments should not be buried with corpses,” he writes, “nor anything else of the kind, as happens among the simple folk” (*Digest* 7.14.5). Note, by the way, that Ulpian attests that it is not the wealthy who are given to the potentially gaudy distribution of prestations but the subelite class. He gives no Epicurean-style rationale – that the dead can no longer benefit from gifts – but implies that the gifting of jewelry and other economically valuable objects somehow disrupts status boundaries between the haves and have-nots. We find class issues, too, revealed in Lucian’s scorn for the funerary practices of “common people”: the coin to pay for Charon, the flowers and garlands left at the grave.⁶

What we can take from this is that giving gifts to the dead was not merely an act by which a Roman citizen might straightforwardly and appropriately broadcast or elevate his or her own status. Rather, ostentatious gift-giving to the dead was associated with those who had materially less, and was denigrated by elites as “common” or “superstitious” behavior. Certain elite attempts to determine what gift was appropriate for nonelites to offer their dead erupted from a deep social conservatism and fear of losing the symbolic and social capital that they had accrued.

Yet the attempt to curb the social ambitions of the have-nots was not all that lies behind the circumscription of the Roman cult of the dead. When Ovid directs certain people to leave specific gifts in specific public places, he in fact municipalizes a practice that had been, up to that point, a family matter (Hopkins 1983: 254). He does something similar when he tells a revealing story: once during a time of war, he says, the Romans neglected to celebrate the Parentalia, where gifts are left for the dead. As a consequence, “misshapen ghosts” came up from the tombs and “howled in the city streets and in the countryside at large” (*Fast.* 2.547 ff. in Hopkins 1983: 234). Keith Hopkins comments: “The message is clear: the dead had to be placated by offerings of food and drink” (Hopkins 1983: 234). Hopkins reveals an overly simplistic interpretation of Ovid’s warnings: “In popular belief, that is what [the dead] lived off.” Yet Ovid conveys, I believe, another more subtle take-away message: it is not so much that food and drink must be offered lest the dead starve or range angrily through the streets, but that Romans had an obligation to observe a holiday according to a clearly defined set of social practices. It was the task of guiding figures in the Imperial era to channel privatized devotional and ritual practices into codified, public form, which is why the Parentalia and Ferialia were classed uncomfortably as private family rituals on the official calendar of public, civic holidays

(Davies 1999: 146). The operative principles behind this control of the cult of the dead were common to Roman social concerns, and we must make no mistake: these are *concerns for the living*: the maintenance of civic and familial duty, tradition, and social and fiscal conservatism.

In the Roman world, conservatism and tradition undergirded ritual – not the sense of “we leave gifts because they benefit the dead” or because the dead (or the *manes*) will grant us boons in return, but because ritual was a powerful language by which social status could be negotiated and renegotiated. The insistence that Romans must leave offerings for the dead – insisted with the same surety with which they insisted that the dead were no longer available to receive those gifts – can only be explained as concealing and condensing complex notions of the power of gift-giving in defining and redefining both symbolic and social capital.

In the end, is Mauss’s theoretical framework of *The Gift* useful for illuminating Roman practices of giving gifts to the dead? Because of the importance that it places on material, as opposed to symbolic, gifts for establishing social relations between individuals and groups, Mauss’s theory is, in this particular instance, self-limiting. Only if we can extend notions of gift and counter-gift to include purely symbolic actions and symbolic capital can we profitably “think with” Mauss. Critics may respond, then, that we no longer owe the debt to Mauss at all for this conceptual turn, but to Mauss’s successor, Pierre Bourdieu. So let me answer Mauss’s theory of total prestations and the inevitability of reciprocity with the words of the American social theorist John Durham Peters:

Gifts to the dead are the purest kind of dissemination; they involve some of the most splendid acts we can know and do. ... Our communication with the dead may never reach them, but such elliptical sending is as important as circular reciprocity. It would be foolish to disparage communications that never leave our own circle as only failures. (Peters 1999: 152)

Notes

- 1 I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Professor Michael Satlow for convening a stimulating conference, and for the invitation to contribute to this volume. I have benefited greatly from the opportunity to approach Roman materials from a perspective outside my own training as a historian. I would like to extend special thanks to Karen Stern for our discussions on grave gifts and burial in Rome.
- 2 The *ustrina*, where bodies were burned but the ashes carried away for deposit, were larger and more public than *busta*, smaller funerary pyres in burial complexes where the ashes were deposited nearby. See Festus, s.v. “bustum” (Lindsay 1997: 29): *bustum proprie dicitur locus, in quo mortuus est combustus et sepultus ... ubi vero combustus quis tantummodo alibi vero est sepultus, is locus ab urendo ustrina vocatur*. For tomb inscriptions that mention *ustrina*, see *CIL* 5.3554, 8308; 6.10237; 6.11576 (*Hoc monumentum et ustrinum*); 10.6414.

- 3 These burials are of cremated remains, placed within sarcophagi or ossuaries. See, for instance, Statius's account of the funeral of the noblewoman Priscilla: (*Silv.* 5.1.194–96, 209–12, 214–17).
- 4 The practice of necromantic offerings is at least pan-Mediterranean; see the outstanding study of Schmidt 1996. For the Greek and Roman material, see Janowitz 2001; Dickie 2003; Ogden 2004.
- 5 In this case, there is some basis linguistically for such an interpretation; in archaic Greece, the dead were sometimes referred to as the *eudeipnoi*, or “those who enjoyed their meal” (Johnston 1999: 41).
- 6 Civic and juristic regulation of and intervention over the quality and nature of grave goods are also evident from ancient Greece; for parallels, see Garland 1985 [2001]: 25, 37.

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Further Reading

Those interested in surveying ancient Roman gift-giving should turn first to Toynbee 1971 for a survey of the extant archaeological evidence. In terms of social practice and anthropological theory, Morris 1992 remains unparalleled, although it also covers material from

ancient Greece and data on gift-giving remain largely confined to Greece. Less technical, but still useful (and broader in its scope), is Davies 1999. A highly enjoyable read is the late Keith Hopkins's collection of essays (Hopkins 1983), particularly his chapter "Death in Rome." It offers the unique perspective of a sociologist of ancient Rome. The most outstanding resource that combines cutting-edge anthropological work (primarily Roman Britain) is John Pearce's volume of collected essays based on 1998 conference proceedings (Pearce, Millett, and Struck 2000). The brief, generally technical essays assembled in this volume nicely balance more generalized studies listed above, providing case studies and archaeological-survey data that facilitate a more nuanced, detailed understanding of the diverse practices of Roman gift-giving as part of a funerary or mortuary process.

Graffiti as Gift: Mortuary and Devotional Graffiti in the Late Ancient Levant¹

KAREN B. STERN

The Beth She‘arim necropolis, carved into the hills of the southwestern Galilee in modern Israel, contains unparalleled archaeological evidence for Jewish populations of the late ancient Levant. Subterranean chambers, once accessed by steps and pathways, encase mortuary remains of hundreds of burials of multiple generations of families from Roman Palestine and surrounding regions. Commemorative inscriptions discovered in the complex, which include names that duplicate those of rabbis attested in early Jewish and Christian literatures, exemplify rare intersections between archaeological and literary records for Judaism in Roman Palestine. Discussion of the cemetery’s burials and their associated epitaphs, as a result, have shaped subsequent debates about the role of Talmudic rabbis in late antiquity, the relative significance of Palestine to Jews of the Mediterranean diaspora, and the diversity of religious traditions in the Roman east.²

Despite widespread attention to several features of the necropolis, scholars have largely ignored hundreds of examples of ancient textual and iconographic graffiti that also adorn its interior walls, ceilings, and door frames. These include texts scrawled in Greek and Semitic scripts, which offer well-wishes to the deceased, and irregularly scratched pictures of armed men in combat, ships, and menorah symbols. Implicit hierarchies that govern the study of the catacombs have assured continued neglect of these features: epitaphs and programmatic tomb decorations have retained greater historical value to scholars than inscriptions and drawings that appear to be more amateurly or haphazardly drawn. Closer attention to these graffiti, however, reveals significant consistencies in their contents and placement and suggests that their application – both in Beth She‘arim and elsewhere – might be more systematic than previously assumed.

The opportunity to reexamine gift-giving in antiquity, I suggest, encourages attention to these neglected graffiti and inspires new explanations for their presence throughout the catacombs. First, collective reexamination of graffiti from Beth She‘arim and other regional burial caves suggests that many of the markings reflect otherwise unrecognized activities the living once performed to commemorate the deceased. Second, reconsideration of Marcel Mauss’s theory of gift-giving prompts an additional hypothesis about these mortuary graffiti – that their application merits secondary classification as one form of gift-giving to the dead. I argue that greater attention to these graffiti, combined with adjustments to Mauss’s gift-giving model, both illuminate overlooked features of regional mortuary practices and permit the broader investigation of locally determined commemorative practices in the late ancient Levant.

Methodology and Limitations

How do I define graffiti and processes of gift-giving and why consider graffiti as a type of gift? In this study, I count as graffiti both painted (*dipinti*) and incised (*graffiti*) words and symbols that border mortuary spaces or adorn passageways, door-jambs, archways, ceilings, and entrances to burial caves. I exclude from this category those inscriptions that explicitly commemorate the dead, such as epitaphs. Contents of these graffiti vary: some include generalized words of comfort for the deceased, curses against tomb robbers, and alphabet lists. Others include figural and geometric images, such as humans with extended and exaggerated digits, ships, bulls, and horses, as well as concentric circles incised with compasses. Basic literacies were complex and varied throughout the ancient world (Thomas 1992; Johnson and Parker 2009); I therefore incorporate images as well as texts into this category.

It remains impossible to determine how ancients might have classified diversely what appears as so-called graffiti to the modern eye: some might have considered texts or images they incised superficially on catacomb walls to be elegant, practiced, and ritualized mortuary sentiments or symbols. Use of graffiti as a category that encompasses all such markings therefore distorts available data, by artificially unifying diverse sets of decorative and writing practices that ancient authors and artists once viewed as entirely unrelated. An anachronistic category, such as graffiti, however, retains utility as a targeted heuristic; it constitutes a provisional and analytical grouping that encourages attention to otherwise neglected vestiges of writing, decorative, and gifting practices once conducted throughout the catacombs. The capaciousness of the category facilitates attention to multiple elements of the necropolis, which are often isolated according to genre; collective consideration of graffiti draws attention to the dialectics of image and text, as well as the decorative and nondecorative functions of words and images in the Beth She‘arim mortuary complex and elsewhere.

Just as this definition of graffiti necessarily accommodates the parameters of available archaeological data, so too does this approach require modification of theories

of gift-giving, which Mauss famously proposed in *The Gift* (Mauss 1923–1924). As Nicola Denzey Lewis notes elsewhere in this volume, discussions of gifts in mortuary contexts particularly challenge Mauss’s theory of gifts as total prestations, whereby true gifts demand – either implicitly or explicitly – a counterprestation. According to Maussian frameworks, for example, placements of unguentaria graveside and inscriptions of well-wishes on catacomb walls could not qualify as acts of true gift-giving, unless the donation of these “gifts” (whether perfume bottles or scratched texts) anticipated a counterprestation. And even if locally determined beliefs about afterlife permitted the notion that the dead could reciprocate such gifts, what might qualify as a countergift? As Denzey Lewis rightly describes, scholars of Roman antiquity commonly resolve these intractable difficulties by relying on unfounded speculations about Roman “afterlife belief.” These solutions remain even more problematic for the evaluation of mortuary practices in the Roman Levant, where locally determined beliefs and activities relating to death remain equally elusive.

I suggest that Mauss’s theories serve as useful hermeneutical tools, even if they require significant adjustment for the discussion of archaeological data from Levantine mortuary contexts. My solution to the reciprocity problem posed by Mauss’s theory is to circumvent it: I provisionally redefine gifts and processes of gift-giving as objects and activities that are explicitly transferred or performed for the substantive benefit of another entity. According to this working definition, true gift-giving is not predicated upon acts of reciprocity, and gifts need not be “things” or objects – acts and gestures could also qualify as gifts if they were proffered as such. Donors and recipients of gifts, moreover, need not be human – they could also include the ghostlike or silent dead. While such parameters for gifting necessarily break from Mauss’s theory, they respond specifically to the data from Roman Palestine, where graveside practices and beliefs about afterlife varied considerably among commemorators. In Beth She‘arim alone, for example, commemorative and burial behaviors were diverse. Most epitaphs exclude any information about an afterlife, while others explicitly describe the dead as destined for Hades, and still others predict that the interred dead await resurrection. Expanded approaches to gifting both permit the reconsideration of an archaeologically attested medium such as graffiti and accommodate diversities in local beliefs about death and the afterlife.

But what justifies the consideration of graffiti as a type of gift? Graffiti, even in the modern world, are rarely classified as gifts. Any worker for Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City would certainly agree. Meanings of graffiti, moreover, remain elusive and depend entirely on their variable authors, contents, and precise contexts. On walls of ancient Pompeii, for example, graffiti served as vehicles of bald political satire, insult, or sexual braggadocio (Funari 1993; Vivolo 1993). Farther east in ancient Hatra they served as a means to advertise one’s political allegiance or devotion to a particular cult (Ricciardi 1998; Kaizer 2000). On the walls of the Syrian synagogue in Dura Europos they served as petitions of self-advocacy before the divine (Noy and Bloedhorn 2004; Stern forthcoming). Nearly two millennia later, in modern south-central Los Angeles, graffiti continue to mark the territories of gangs like the Crips from those of rivals like the

Bloods. On the walls of catacombs and burial caves in the mortuary complexes of Beth She‘arim, however, graffiti served distinct purposes still. In any of these contexts, does it appear reasonable to envision graffiti as types of gifts?

Closer attention to consistencies in the contents and placement of graffiti in ancient burial caves suggests the plausibility of reading these markings as vestiges of commemorative and gift-giving practices. Inscribers’ motivations for applying graffiti to catacomb walls ultimately remain obscure, but some markings explicitly announce that their inscribers applied them to assure the well-being of the individual and collective dead. To those who scratched graffiti onto catacomb walls, their promises of comfort, protection, and provision may have served as critical gifts for the dead interred nearby.

One last feature of the Beth She‘arim complex and its associated graffiti requires mention. As scholars such as Tessa Rajak (2002) and Seth Schwartz (2002) have appropriately cautioned, the so-called Jewishness of individuals who were buried in the necropolis is neither a facile nor a foregone conclusion (Avigad and Mazar 1993). The simultaneous presence in mortuary graffiti of definitive markers of Jewishness, such as *menorot*, and images of more ambiguous cultural association, such as eagles or human combatants, cautions against confident conclusions about monolithic religious and cultural practices among the cemetery’s burial populations.³ Ranges of sentiments, symbols, and placements of graffiti throughout the mortuary complex, in tandem, support hypotheses about the diversity of cultural identities among interred populations and their commemorators; they also demonstrate variations in the chronology and demography of the complex. As the cultural identities of the graffiti-inscribers remain elusive, this approach emphasizes discernible patterns in graffiti application: careful examination of these patterns ultimately offers improved data for consideration of the gifting practices and cultural identities of those who buried and commemorated their dead at Beth She‘arim.

Graffiti as Gifts of Comfort

Textual graffiti that contain words of comfort for the deceased constitute one genre of graffiti common in the necropolis. Three stone doorways, intricately carved to imitate wooden and brass-studded doors, facilitated entrance to Catacomb 20 in Beth She‘arim where several “comfort” graffiti are clustered (Avigad 1976; henceforth *BS* 3: 90–92; see Figure 10.1).

One graffito incised on the interior wall facing the northeast doorway reads, “Take comfort, holy fathers, no one is immortal” (*BS* 3: 95, Figure 41; see Figure 10.2a).

To the left of this graffito and arching over the edge of the entryway ceiling, a second graffito wishes, “Good luck in your resurrection” (*BS* 3: 95, Figure 42; see Figure 10.2b).

Both texts include three lines incised in Greek, but their paleographic differences suggest distinct authorship.⁴ While each graffito was probably engraved sometime



Figure 10.1 External façade of Catacomb 20 in Beth She'arim.

Photo: Ezra Gabbay.

(a)



Figure 10.2a Greek graffito from interior entrance to Catacomb 20, which reads: “Take comfort, holy fathers, no one is immortal!”

Photo: Ezra Gabbay. Reproduced with permission of the Israel National Parks Authority.

between the third and fifth centuries, their relative chronology remains obscure.⁵ The placement of the texts around a catacomb entrance assured their illumination whenever the catacomb doors were opened – either for funerals or for commemorative visits to the tombs inside. Regardless of their visibility to the living, however, sentiments in the texts appear to be directed to the dead.

(b)

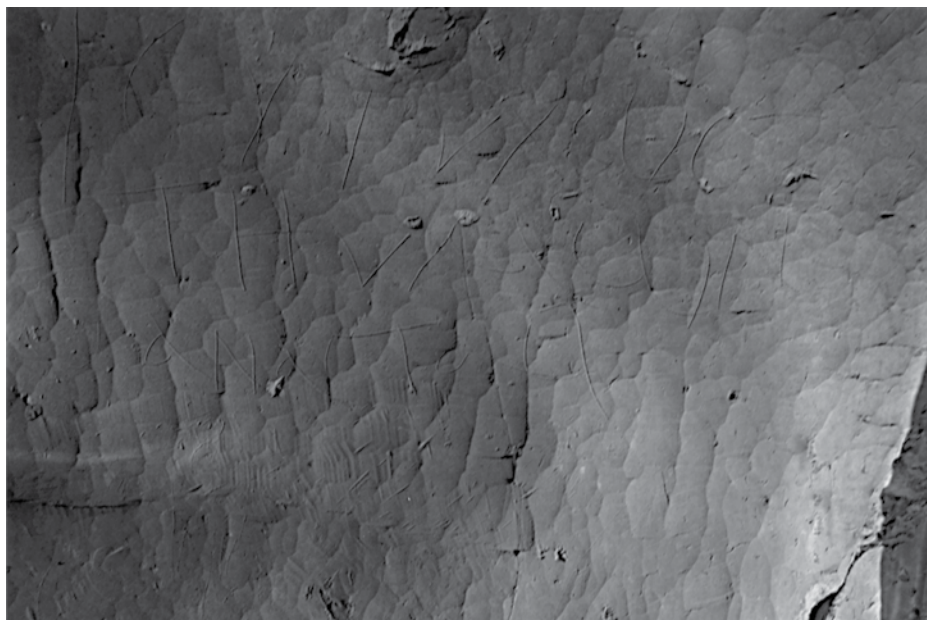


Figure 10.2b Greek graffito from interior entrance to Catacomb 20, which offers: “Good luck on your resurrection!”

Photo: Ezra Gabbay. Reproduced with permission of the Israel National Parks Authority.

The first graffito directly entreats the “holy fathers” or “holy parents” (*pateres hosioi*) to take courage or comfort (*tharsite*). Such a statement apparently counters an expectation that holy ones, upon the decease of their bodies, might immediately experience shock or fear. While the sentiment does not explicitly address souls or ghosts of the deceased, its efficacy appears to rely on expectations that to comprehend the message, some aspect of the “holy fathers” might remain sufficiently sentient after death. This offer of comfort, however, remains a stylized one. Comparably worded graffiti are discovered beside epitaphs throughout the necropolis and particularly in Catacomb 12; these, too, entreat the deceased to take courage (*BS* 3: 26; Pl. V, 4). The repetition of the formula may dilute its potency here, but the possibility remains that the chosen verb, *tharseō*, like similar verbs in Hebrew and Greek biblical texts (LXX Proverbs 31:11; Mark 10:49; 1 Thessalonians 3:1–7; 5:9–11; 2 Corinthians 13:1), may be proffered as a technical term – it may serve to comfort and assure the dead who enter that they will be properly cared for by the living.

The second graffito wishes luck to the dead during the resurrection process; its contents differ significantly from the previous text but also echo sentiments replicated elsewhere in the catacombs. Like the first graffito, this text confronts the dead directly and in the plural (*eutychēs*). Unlike the previous sentiment, however, which specifically addresses “holy fathers,” this graffito apparently addresses a broader audience. By offering favorable luck to the dead during “your resurrection,”

this sentiment may suggest a notion that those eligible for resurrection might include all the dead carried inside, or, at least, a plurality that might be bigger than the holy fathers. This graffito, moreover, distinctly implies that the process of resurrection was sufficiently precarious to inspire commemorators' wishes of luck; if mechanisms for resurrection were easy or inevitable, offerings of well-wishes like these would be superfluous.

Resurrection remains a common theme in all genres of inscriptions from the necropolis, but sentiments about it and about individuals' eligibilities for it vary considerably. Texts of some epitaphs suggest that only the most righteous or worthy would attain rebirth after death, while others, like the second graffito, imply that a broader category of individuals, or all of the dead, might be eligible for resurrection. Regional literature mimics these inconsistencies; disparate statements about resurrection in contemporary archaeological and rabbinic literary contexts exemplify a comparable lack of consensus (Rutgers 1998; Park 2000; Nickelsburg 2006). Partly for such reasons, it remains unclear precisely how these two graffiti might relate to each other with respect to the inscribers' beliefs about resurrection or an afterlife or how the person(s) who incised them anticipated the means (if at all) of their efficacy: one offers comfort by reminding the deceased of their unavoidable mortality, the other by reminding the dead that mortality is only temporary.

Discrepancies between these sentiments inspire additional sets of questions. Did authors incise texts at the entrance to the catacomb in order to greet the dead as they entered on a bier, or, alternatively, to convey a permanent message to some (if not all) of those buried in the same catacomb? Did their inscribers view their messages as complementary or distinct? Did they believe that the dead were somehow more literate than were their living counterparts? Did writers scratch these sentiments to comfort themselves or other mourners, or did they think their work might also impact the dead? While definitive answers to these questions remain elusive, some consistencies among the graffiti remain more suggestive. Despite the differences in the contents of these graffiti, for example, the decision to commemorate their sentiments by scratching them into stone, rather than reciting them orally without an inscription, may attest to authors' hopes that the dead might benefit, in some way, from their writing on the catacomb wall. Placement of graffiti at the entrance to the caves, moreover, could be talismanic; incisions of texts at entrances and doorways of the complex might reflect inscribers' beliefs that the precise position of the graffiti enhanced their efficacy (Magness 2010; Stern 2012). Sentiments in graffiti or images in tomb decoration may have offered comfort to those who visited the tombs, but their application might have served a complementary function – to assuage the fears of some of the newly deceased, to wish them luck and safety during processes of death and rebirth.

Incisions of these types of graffiti are not unique to the Beth She'arim catacombs; textual graffiti that greet or herald the dead appear around entrances to burial caves throughout the region. Some of the Aramaic graffiti from the vestibule of Jason's tomb in Jerusalem may serve to comfort the dead in comparable ways

(Rachmani 1967; Berlin 2002: 142). A Hebrew graffito from an antechamber of a cave from Beit Loya near Hebron may appeal similarly for divine intercession by requesting, “May YHWH deliver [you].”⁶ Placement and contents of graffiti at the entrance to Catacomb 20, in these respects, resemble other regional examples; they similarly greet the dead and invoke their posthumous sustenance and blessing.

Graffiti as Gifts of Protection

Additional genres of textual and figurative dipinti and graffiti, which include apotropaic texts and images, differently exemplify how individuals might have applied graffiti to protect, as well as comfort, some of the dead buried in Beth She‘arim. One Greek text painted over an arcosolium in Catacomb 13, for example, reads: “Anyone who changes this lady’s place, he who promised to resurrect the dead will Himself judge him” (Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974; hereafter *BS* 2: 139). Comparable dipinti, discovered throughout the catacombs, similarly command that no one violate tombs nearby: divine retribution is invoked on persons who commit such terrible acts of spoliation (*BS* 2: 123, 134). Apotropaic sentiments such as these enjoy a long history in mortuary contexts throughout the Levant and elsewhere in the Mediterranean (Van der Horst 1991: 54–60; Naveh 1992: 198; Strubbe 1995; Hachlili 2005: 496; Cotton, Di Segni, Eck, *et al.* 2010). Despite the regional conventionality of these sentiments, the urgency expressed in the Beth She‘arim dipinti might reflect individuals’ real desires to protect the remains of the dead and to ward off potential violators. To those who applied these words around burial beds, the safety of the deceased, perhaps in an afterlife, partly relied on the integrity of a tomb and associated remains. Inscribers might have applied this type of dipinto to protect a grave and thereby the fate of an associated soul.

Ranges of incised images throughout the catacombs may exhibit complementary efforts to use graffiti to physically protect the dead. Pictorial graffiti beside some tombs include figural images of soldiers or gladiators outfitted in military garb. One elaborate graffito in Catacomb 4 depicts a bald figure dressed like a Roman soldier, wearing a cuirass, armor, and belt and pointing a spear to the right toward a nearby tomb (see Figure 10.3).⁷

A less elaborate figure carved to his upper right also brandishes a spear and may serve as an altered copy of this image. Both graffiti border an epitaph that commemorates a certain “Germanus, son of Isaac the Palmyrene” (Catacomb 4, Hall C, Room I; Mazar 1973: hereafter *BS* 1: 182, Figure 15.) A second graffiti cluster is incised lower on the same wall between this and a neighboring burial bed to its right (see Figure 10.4). In this set of images, a figure on the left wears some sort of oversized headgear or a net, which his combatant has cast upon him; perhaps he holds a shield. He brandishes a sword in his left hand, which he points toward the figure to his right, who wears a tunic or belt that bares his thighs, but no protective helmet, and whose hair stands on end. He points a spear toward his neighbor.⁸



Figure 10.3 Graffiti of soldiers or armed figures in Catacomb 4 at Beth She‘arim.
Photo: Ezra Gabbay. Reproduced with permission of the Israel National Parks Authority.

Accepted interpretations of these graffiti posit that they serve as figurative representations of soldiers buried in the caves, or, alternatively, render the gladiatorial activities that may have led to the demises of those interred (*BS* 1: 183–84; Pl. XXXVI; Weiss 1999: 48; cf. Noy and Bloedhorn 2004: 82). Such explanations partly respond to the proximity of the images in the same burial hall and to their placement beside epitaphs that include names stereotypically associated with Roman rather than Jewish contexts. The equation of an image of a soldier with the burial of a soldier and the image of a gladiator with the burial of a gladiator offers one possible explanation for the images, but ignores the role of context in their interpretation. Additionally, while epitaphs occasionally mention the professions of the deceased, graphic representations of this information are otherwise unprecedented in the catacombs and mortuary complexes nearby. Both interpretations, moreover, rely on persistent assumptions about cultural and onomastic practices, whereby Jews who bore Roman-like names, such as Germanus, would live, die, and be commemorated in more Roman-like ways. The correlative if subtle assumption is that



Figure 10.4 Graffiti of armed figures in combat in Catacomb 4 at Beth She‘arim.

Photo: Ezra Gabbay. Reproduced with permission of the Israel National Parks Authority.

“proper” Jewish individuals would be more reticent to enlist as soldiers or gladiators or (somehow) solicit images beside their tombs. Multiple factors challenge these streams of logic. As many scholars have recently argued, qualities of individuals’ names cannot predict their actions and beliefs during their lifetimes (Mussies 1994: 242). Abundant examples of figural art from the catacombs, moreover, challenge assumptions about Jewish aversion to such images. Interpretations of these graffiti require revision.

Appearance of similar images in other regional burial caves, foremost, inspires distinct readings of the Beth She‘arim military or gladiator graffiti. Comparable graffiti discovered on walls of burial caves of Horvat Tel ‘Eitun near Maresha/Eleutheropolis, for example, demonstrate several similarities to the Beth She‘arim examples: in Tel ‘Eitun, weapon-carrying figures are also incised around burial spaces. Tel ‘Eitun graffiti include human figures drawn with abstract facial features and hair; some wear shields and chest armor, while others bear weapons with spears on one end and pitchforks on another (see Figure 10.5; Tsferis 1982: 24).

Dominant interpretations of these graffiti similarly posit that their images depict dead soldiers or gladiators buried in the caves, even if no supplementary information links their iconography with the professions of those buried nearby (cf. Tsferis 1982).

Broader regional comparisons of the design and placement of figurative graffiti in Beth She‘arim with those in Tel ‘Eitun and elsewhere, however, might support alternative hypotheses about their presence in each of these complexes. In regions farther south, in Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria, for example, reliefs and images of armed sentinels and composite animals such as sphinxes often flanked entrances to burial caves to deter tomb robbers (Empereur 1995; Corbelli 2006). Visitors to

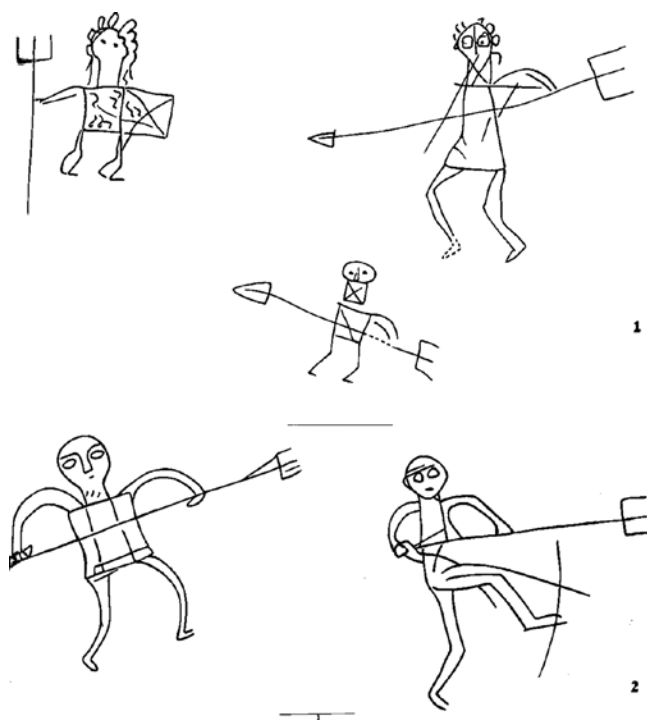


Figure 10.5 Graffiti of weapon-carrying figures from burial caves of Tel 'Eitun (Tsaferis 1982: 23, 24).

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Beth She'arim, or to Tel 'Eitun for that matter, may have positioned graffito-figures with armor and weapons beside tombs for similar reasons. Commemorators who visited these mortuary complexes might have scratched weapon-carrying figures at the borders of burial beds not to represent the images of the dead but to serve as sentinels to defend tombs and their contents from human or demonic intruders. Pictorial graffiti around regional mortuary spaces, then, might have served functions similar to the previous category of textual graffiti: to protect the dead during the perilous processes of interment, resurrection, and even rebirth.

Graffiti as Gifts of Provision

Images of boats remain popular among graffiti carved in Beth She'arim and other regional burial caves (Ben-Eli 1975; Sperber 1986: 48, 76; Van der Horst 1991: 151). Designs of these ships at Beth She'arim vary considerably; within the same catacomb, for example, one graffito renders a ship outfitted with a mast and sails (Catacomb 1, Hall N), while another depicts the profile of a vessel with a similar hull but without sails or oars (Catacomb 1, Hall P; cf. Ben-Eli 1975: no. 66; Sperber 1986; Casson 1995). Additional examples include ships differently outfitted with oars and sails of varying shapes and sizes (see Figures 10.6 and 10.7).



Figure 10.6 Two graffiti of ships from wall of collapsed cave of Mugharet el-Jehennem in Beth She'arim.

Photo: Ezra Gabbay. Reproduced with permission of the Israel National Parks Authority.

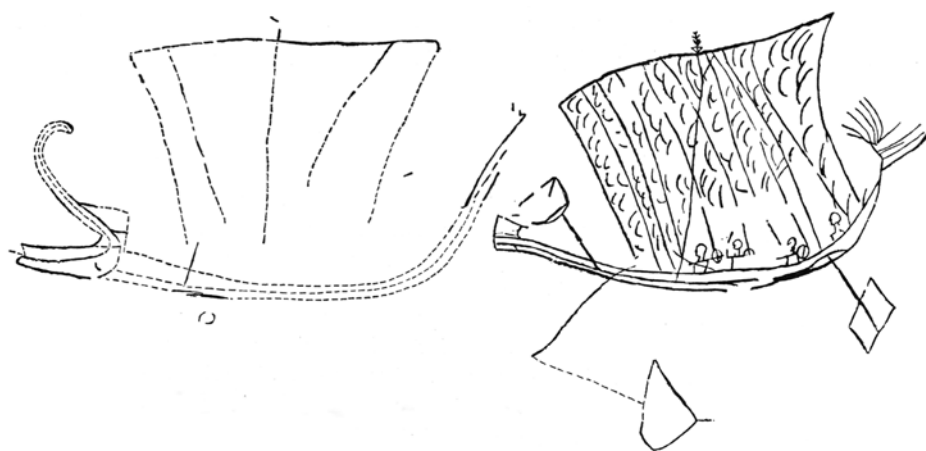


Figure 10.7 Drawing of ships rendered in carbon on west side of vestibule in Jason's tomb, Rechavia, Jerusalem (Rachmani 1967: 70).

Drawing reproduced courtesy of Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

While ship graffiti appear in all regions of the catacombs and on walls of entryways, they are also situated above and beside burial shelves and graves. Consistent presence of these graffiti so close to the dead suggests a connection between their iconography and function at Beth She'arim.

Nautical drawings also appear frequently in other regional mortuary complexes. The vestibule of Jason's tomb in Jerusalem includes three depictions of boats drawn in carbon with varying degrees of detail; at least one depicts human passengers aboard the ship.

Other examples of the graffiti appear in burial caves of the Judean Shefelah (Naveh 1963: Figure 7; Kloner 1994). Presence of nautical graffiti in Beth She'arim, at minimum, suggests broader regional continuities in mortuary decoration. One might push this observation a bit further, however, to seek an additional explanation for the pervasiveness of ship graffiti and dipinti in regional mortuary contexts.

Associations between ships and death remain ubiquitous in multiple regional contexts (Hachlili 2005: 149). Archaeological and literary corpora from the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean consistently describe boats as a principle means to transport a soul to the underworld. In Egypt, Alexandrian tombs included paintings and models of ships to facilitate the passage of the dead into the next life (Corbelli 2006: 41, 48–49; Smith 2009: 332, text 14). Nautical metaphors only more ambiguously inform notions about death described in rabbinic texts (*b. Mo'ed Qat.* 28b–29a), but other regional literatures consistently associate nautical voyages with processes of death. The satirist Lucian, whose Levantine origins may bolster his relevance in investigating regional mortuary customs, mocks the multitudes for believing that the dead required transportation, by boat, to the underworld (*Of Mourning* 3, 15). Pervasiveness of ship graffiti throughout Beth She'arim and consistent placement of related images so close to the bodies of the dead may respond to conceptions of afterlife sustained in other regional contexts. Perhaps commemorators incised graffiti ships in the caves of Beth She'arim, as did neighboring populations, to offer the dead transportation to the world to come.

Additional genres of pictorial graffiti, however, may similarly demonstrate efforts to use scratched or drawn images to assist the dead in the necropolis. Excavation reports record graffiti of storage vessels, which had been scratched onto walls of burial caves. Pictorial graffiti that render ceramic or glass containers are incised on the wall of Catacomb 1, Hall N, where a series of carved images includes two *menorot* on the left and a branch or *lulav* on the right (facing).

Between these motifs appears a series of vessels of various shapes, which include a long-necked vase without handles, an amphora with two handles and a wider base and neck, and, to the left of the latter, a small round object on its side with two projecting necks. Excavators classified this last object as an *ethrog* – a citron associated with festivals and cultic practices of the destroyed Jerusalem temple.

Graffito-images such as those of storage jars rarely attracted excavators' interests, and only graffiti of *menorot*, *lulavim*, and *ethrogim* are well documented in the earliest site reports. Profiles of graffito-jars, however, resemble closely many of their reconstructed ceramic and glass counterparts that were also discovered in the same caves (Figures 10.8–10.10).

Similarities between the two-dimensional graffito-images and remains of three-dimensional containers discovered nearby, of course, may be coincidental.

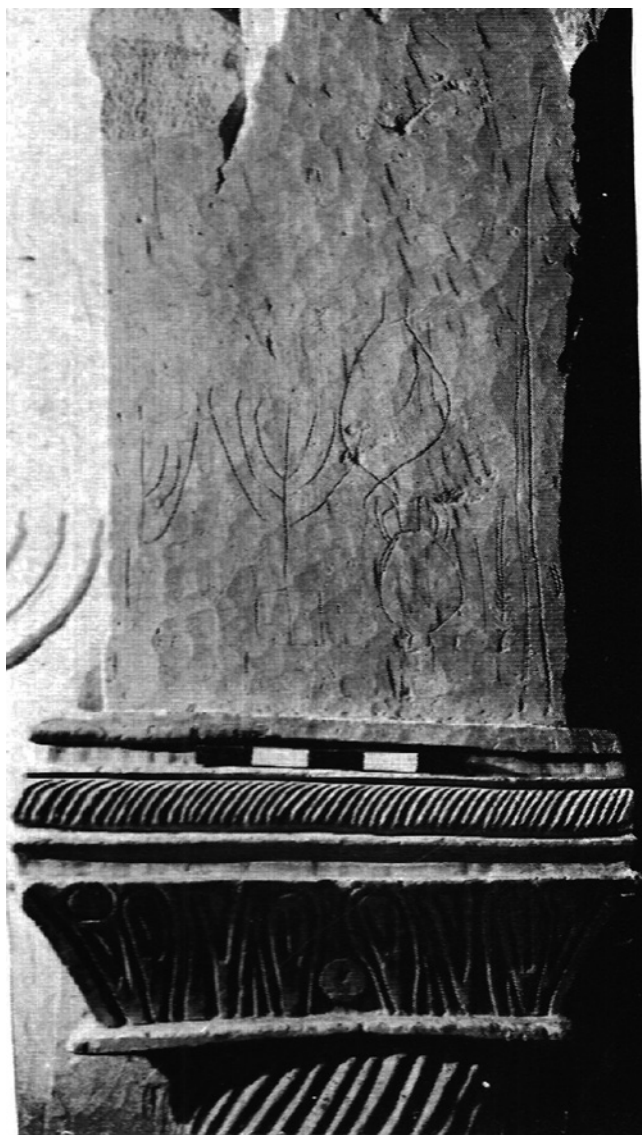


Figure 10.8 Graffiti of *menorot* and vessels, Catacomb 1, Hall N, Rooms 1-2, Beth She‘arim (BS 1: Pl. XVIII 2).

Photo reproduced courtesy of Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

Their comparability, alternatively, might be deliberate and suggest an explanation for the practice of carving images of jars beside tombs and over entrances to burial halls at Beth She‘arim (Figure 10.8).

Contemporary literatures attest to multiple ways the living might have employed vessels to commemorate and provide for the dead. Lucian parodies regional beliefs that that libations and food offerings at tombs would directly benefit the souls of the deceased. In the underworld, he describes the existence of a “numerous class of



Figure 10.9 Pottery discovered throughout Beth She‘arim catacombs (*BS 3: Pl. LXXII*). Photo reproduced courtesy of Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

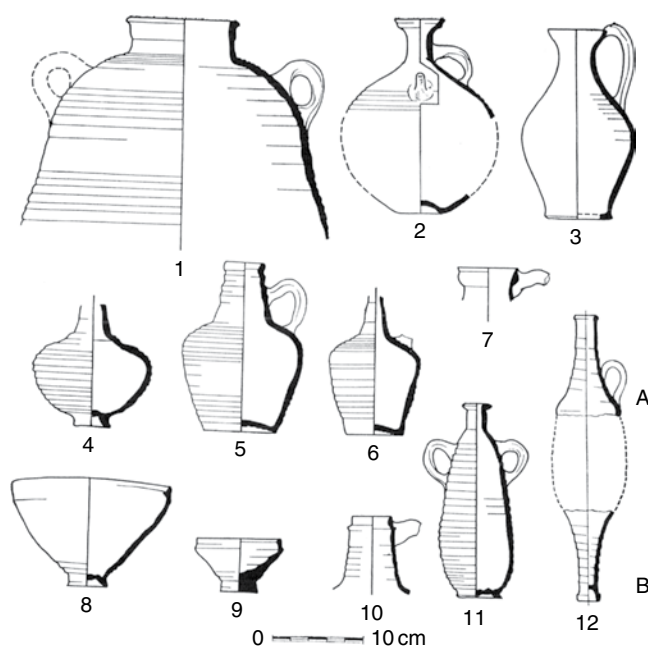


Figure 10.10 Profiles of pottery discovered throughout Beth She‘arim catacombs (*BS 3: 195*). Drawing reproduced courtesy of Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

neutral characters; these wander about the meadow; formless phantoms, that evade the touch. ... It seems that they depend for their nourishment upon the libations and victims offered by us upon their tombs; accordingly, a Shade who has no surviving friends or relations passes a hungry time of it in the lower world” (Lucian, *Of Mourning* 31, in Harmon, trans. 1960). Rabbinic texts similarly report a begrudging acceptability of performing practices at tombs to anoint or feed the dead with spices, perfumes, or other oils (Green 2008; *b. Ber.* 43b; *b. Beṣah* 22b; *m. Ber.* 3.1; *m. Menah.* 10.9; *m. Sanh.* 2.3). Other texts, such as *Midrash Qohelet Rabbah*, may attempt to reinterpret such common practices by asking, “Are there, in fact, food and drink in the grave which accompany a person to the grave? This must mean, rather, Torah and good deeds” (*Midr. Qoh. Rab.*, 2.24). Disturbance of the find contexts of artifacts at Beth She‘arim impairs definitive interpretation of the pottery found throughout the complex. But discoveries of fragments of ceramic and glass jars and unguentaria inside the caves may suggest the conduct of limited graveside commemorative activities that align with those described in contemporary literary narratives.

A review of literary and archaeological data, then, may yield renewed explanations for the vessel graffiti in Beth She‘arim. Ceremonies of feeding, drinking, or incense burning, once conducted at the tombs, would have required use of three-dimensional containers such as vases and unguentaria. Perhaps jars scratched on catacomb walls evoked implements associated with tomb-side feasting or libations, since the representations of vessels mimic the shapes of ceramic fragments discovered nearby. This possibility may prompt a reclassification of related pictorial graffiti. One lightly incised figure at the bottom of a Catacomb 1 graffiti cluster (Figure 10.8), previously classified as an *ethrog*, for example, might be more accurately identified as an unguentarium associated with the pouring or storage of perfumes or spices. Changed interpretations of individual motifs such as this one, moreover, justify greater attention to the vessel graffiti. Rather than serving as “filler” symbols beside those traditionally considered to be more diagnostic of Jewishness, such as *menorot*, vessel graffiti in the catacombs may have served distinct purposes: to replicate in two dimensions the images of implements used to commemorate the deceased. Vessel graffiti may have functioned somewhat like the placement of plastic flowers – perhaps not as good as the real thing, but impervious to destruction and theft nonetheless.

Conclusion: Gifts “Real,” Metaphorical, and Imagined

In his evaluation of the discoveries of Catacomb 1 from Beth She‘arim, Mazar remarked that “some of the drawings and graffiti as well as inscriptions painted or incised by the relatives of the deceased or by visitors, lack any preplanned order and are carelessly executed” (*BS* 1: 136). In the years since the publication of the final reports, few have challenged Mazar’s assessments. The sloppiness and apparently random placement of textual and pictorial graffiti throughout the catacombs seem

to reinforce his point: graffiti from the complex appear to be of negligible aesthetic and historical significance.

Closer examination of the Beth She‘arim graffiti combined with a revised approach to Mauss’s theories of gift-giving, however, encourage renewed interpretations of these markings. Consistencies in the content and locations of graffiti inside the necropolis and their comparison with regional analogues suggest that some visitors designed and placed these mortuary graffiti with care and deliberation. Visitors may have classified these types of gestures, moreover, as offerings, or even gifts, to protect and sustain the deceased. Individuals’ motivations for applying graffiti necessarily varied; perhaps they did not anticipate any benefit or response from the dead, or perhaps, alternatively, they expected the souls of the dead to protect the living in return. Other visitors might have believed that drawing gifts for the dead exemplified a type of emulative and generative filial piety whereby those who did so anticipated that their children and grandchildren would do the same for them. More systematic consideration of these textual and pictorial graffiti, in any case, suggests that they signified meaningful acts once performed for the benefit of commemorators or the deceased.

One might argue that if mortuary graffiti reflect features of gift-giving, they do so more symbolically than substantively; some might say that graffiti could serve as gifts that are gestural, affective, and metaphorical, but certainly not as gifts that are real. Several features of these graffiti, nonetheless, challenge such a position. To those who believed in the efficacy of their sentiments and images, graffiti offered palpable and practical benefits to the dead. Visitors to burial complexes might have thought that their inscriptions of well-wishes to the deceased, curses against tomb robbers and drawings of armed sentinels beside tombs constituted methods of defending mortuary caves and their contents. Their renderings of ships and storage containers beside tombs, likewise, might have represented means of transportation and sustenance necessary for individuals after death. Mortuary graffiti that offered luck, protection, and provision could function for their inscribers as tangible gifts in their own right. Placement of these graffiti in Beth She‘arim and elsewhere respond to entrenched and diachronic regional traditions of gifting, which afforded the living a means to comfort, protect, and provide for the active or silent dead.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, and the Tow Faculty Travel Fund of Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, whose support facilitated my field research at Beth She‘arim from 2010–11. I thank Revital Weiss of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and Emma Mayan for their generosity and collaboration and Ezra Gabbay for his photography at the site. I also wish to thank Saul Olyan, Gil Klein, Jonathan Price, and the conference participants for offering important feedback on earlier drafts of this paper, and Nicola Denzey Lewis for her valuable suggestions about mortuary practices throughout the Roman world. Any and all errors, of course, are my own.

- 2 Related scholarly debates are ongoing; see Cohen 1981–1982; Weiss 1992; 2010; Miller 2006; and Rosenfeld 2010.
- 3 Scholars continue to reconsider appropriate methods of distinguishing and interpreting “Jewish” archaeological evidence. Please see the discussions and criteria in Kraemer 1991; Noy 1993; Goodman 1994; Elsner 2003; Stern 2008.
- 4 Translations follow those of *BS* 3. These graffiti are scratched superficially on the smoothed surface of the entryway, but the larger sizes of their letters facilitated their greater visibility. Letters in the first inscription (Figure 10.2a) range from 4.3 to 11 cm high by 2 to 9.6 cm wide; the total height of the inscription is roughly 184 cm. Letters in the second inscription (Figure 10.2b) range from 5.2 to 12 cm high by 3.5 to 14.2 cm wide; the surface area of this inscription is roughly 80 cm by 30 cm. All measurements recorded in this chapter were taken by the author in spring 2011.
- 5 Chronologies of these graffiti necessarily remain obscure; determinations must rely on the contents and contexts of samples in addition to regional comparisons.
- 6 My restoration of the text and the resulting reading differs from that of Naveh (1963: 86), who supplies a second person, rather than first person object for the sentence. He restores the inscription to “May YHWH remember [you]!”.
- 7 This figure is approximately 5 cm high and is carved 170 cm above the ground level.
- 8 These figures are approximately 4.5 to 5.7 cm high and are carved 105 cm above the ground level.

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Further Reading

The most comprehensive consideration of the Beth She'arim catacombs appears in the three-volume excavation reports translated into English from the original Hebrew (Mazar 1973; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974; Avigad 1976); these are summarized and partially updated elsewhere (e.g., Avigad and Mazar 1993; Levine 1997). Some scholars have focused on burial practices evident at the site (Hachlili 2005), while others emphasize its architecture and art (Goodenough 1953–1967; Hachlili 1988). Discussion of the necropolis, moreover, figures prominently in considerations of ethnicity, social history, and cultural identity of the Galilee in late antiquity (Avi-Yonah 1984; Schwartz 1995; Lapin 1999, 2001; and Zangenberg, Attridge, and Martin 2007). Ongoing debates (e.g., Cohen 1981; Weiss 1992; Miller 2006; Rosenfeld 2010) assess whether the rabbis mentioned in epitaphs from Beth She'arim emerged from the same cultural milieu as rabbis described in texts of the Mishnah and Talmud, while others (Schwartz 2001, 2002; Rajak 2002) have challenged hypotheses of several scholars (Avigad 1976; Gafni 1981, 1997; Levine 1997) that the Beth She'arim necropolis served as an international cemetery for Jewish populations throughout the Mediterranean. Aside from consideration of individual inscriptions in *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* (IJO III) (Noy and Bloedhorn 2004), a forthcoming volume of CIIP *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, (Cotton, Di Segni, Eck, *et al.* 2010), and specific excavation reports and surveys of sites farther south in the Judean foothills (i.e., Zissu 1995), few scholars have written specifically about graffiti discovered in Roman Palestine. Considerations of graffiti and informal writing elsewhere the Mediterranean have recently proliferated (Bagnall 2011; Taylor and Baird 2011).

Marriage Gifts in Ancient Greece

BEATE WAGNER-HASEL

Introduction

When Marcel Mauss developed his famous theory of giving in the 1920s, it contrasted markedly with an excessively utilitarian morality that had its roots in the legal and economic debates of the nineteenth century. A strictly ethical conception of the economy was predominant in the Historical School of national economists that had been developing in the wake of historicism and that remained essentially limited to German-speaking countries. Economy was understood in a neoromantic sense as a social-organic life process, subject to continuous waxing and waning. This, in turn, cast doubt on the idea of a universal applicability of modern economic categories (Winkel 1977: 82–87, 138–40). The Historical School's critique was thus directed against the moral implications of a concept of exchange that had become dominant with the rise of liberal theory since the seventeenth century, that is, exchange as a self-interested act aimed at attaining economic advantage (Plumpe 2007). Using the legal concept of making a gift (*Schenkung*) as an altruistic act undertaken for the benefit of another, the Historical School developed a counter-model that conceived of exchange not as a self-interested act but as being based on mutuality or reciprocity (Wagner-Hasel 2000: 27–52; 2003; 2006). Defining “gift” as a contract that consisted of three elements – giving, receiving, and giving in return – Mauss placed himself within the framework of a legal concept of making gifts, according to which gift-giving required the acceptance by the recipient and – in premodern law – its reciprocation in order to be legally binding (Mauss 1990: 33–43; 47–49). More strongly than his predecessors, Marcel Mauss constructed premodern gift-giving as a social act performed in order to create moral obligations, whereas economists such as Karl Bücher put the emphasis on the economic needs underlying the exchange of gifts in archaic societies (Bücher 1918). Although the evolutionist models of a development from gift-giving to barter have meanwhile been convincingly deconstructed (Bloch and Parry 1989), the economic aspects of

gift-giving have often been neglected. While anthropologists have come to underline the significance of the concept for a better understanding of archaic economic systems (Polanyi 1944, cf. Wagner-Hasel 2011: 292–95), sociologists and philosophers still make use of it to criticize modern economies, just as Marcel Mauss had done (Caillé and Godbout 1991; Berking 1996; Godelier 1996; Hénaff 2002).

My aim here is to investigate marriage gifts and their economic impact. I will return to the path that political economy left in the nineteenth century when it began to question the universality of exchange and focused instead on the social needs of the parties involved. I am deeply indebted to recent anthropological research, especially to Annette B. Weiner's reexamination of the classical sites of gift-exchange in the southern Pacific, the Trobriand Islands, and Samoa (Malinowski 1922), and to Willemijn de Jong's research on marriage gifts in Indonesia. Weiner has suggested that we avoid the concept of "reciprocity" in interpreting archaic forms of exchange, and instead investigate the paths of circulation that gifts follow within cycles of social reproduction (Weiner 1976, 1980). I have tried to make productive use of this concept elsewhere (Wagner-Hasel 1988, 2000: 52–59). De Jong has focused on the reciprocity of gifts (de Jong 1994, 1998, 2000) we normally associate with different marriage systems, the dowry system, and the bride-price system (Goody and Tambiah 1973). Beyond following them, I will also take up the argument of the British historian Edward P. Thompson, who argues that there can be no "constant 'act of giving' with constant features, which may be isolated from particular social contexts," since the structure of gift-giving always emerges within the historical peculiarity of the ensemble of social relations "and not in a particular ritual or form isolated from these" (Thompson 1977: 258). The variability of the vocabulary relating to the gift in ancient Greece will confirm this suggestion.

The Solonian Regulation of the *phernai*

Greek vocabulary has a whole range of terms used to designate different types of gifts which belong to different contexts: besides *dōron*, the classical term for any kind of "gift," there are special terms such as *xenion*, the gift of hospitality; *charis*, which can be translated as "gift of thanks," "favor," "mark of favor," "service," as well as "grace," and which is often used in relationships of cooperation (*philotēs* or *philia*); *hedna*, the bride-wealth; *dōtinē*, often used for the gifts of the people for a high-ranking person; or *dōrea*, the term for designating the benefits of foreign rulers (Benveniste 1951; 1969: 65–101; MacLachlan 1993; Scheid-Tissinier 1994; Wagner-Hasel 2000, 2002, 2006).

In this paper, I intend to study a special term for female gifts, *phernē*, often misunderstood as "dowry," and to consider the significance of female wedding gifts in ancient Greece. My starting point will be the Solonian marriage law. In part 20 of his biography of Solon, Plutarch describes the Solonian laws concerning inheritance and marriage. After dealing with the marriage of the heiress, Plutarch

continues: “In all other marriages he prohibited dowries (*tas phernas*); the bride was to bring with her three changes of raiment, household stuff of small value (*himatia tria kai skeuē mikrou nomismatos axia*), and nothing else”: τῶν δ’ ἄλλων γάμων ἀφεῖλε τὰς φερνὰς, ἱμάτια τρία καὶ σκεύη μικροῦ νομίσματος ἄξια κελεύσας, ἕτερον δὲ μηδὲν, ἐπιφέρεισθαι τὴν γαμουμένην (Plutarch *Vit. Sol.* 20.4, trans. B. Perrin).

The meaning of this law (as quoted in Bernadotte Perrin’s translation) has been the subject of controversial discussion. Plutarch does not use the technical term *proix*, which denotes the dowry in classical Attic law, but *phernē*. This term is used only by poets and historians to describe the practices in former times (Aeschylus *Supp.* 979; Euripides *IA* 47; *Ion* 298; *Med.* 988–57; *Or.* 1662; *Andr.* 147) or in foreign countries (Lydia: Herodotus 1.93.4; Crete: Ephorus ap. Strabo 10.4.20) and is to be found in Ptolemaic law (Schultheß 1938; Yiftach-Firanko 2003: 60–83). The first use of *proix* cannot securely be dated before the fifth century (Stavrianopoulou 2006: 60–83). We do not know the term in use in Solonian times. The Homeric terms are *hedna* and *dōra*, and they describe the gifts of the groom, the bride-wealth or bride-price (Finley 1955; Snodgrass 1974; Wagner-Hasel 1988, 2000: 141–52). How and why the practice changed from bride-wealth to dowry is still obscure.¹

Ancient lexicographers believed in the identity of the *phernē* and the *proix*, but modern scholars have not followed them. Whereas Walter Erdmann questioned the authenticity of the whole law (Erdmann 1934: 212, 300), most scholars have come to interpret the Solonian *phernē* as personal gifts to the bride – in German we would say *Aussteuer*; the French term is *trousseau*. They make a functional difference between *phernē* as a personal gift/trousseau and the *proix* as dowry (German *Mitgift*; French *dot* or *biens dotaux*). The term *proix* designates the properties that are being conveyed from the wife’s paternal *oikos* “household” to that of her prospective sons. For Hans Julius Wolff the *phernē* belongs to a more individualistic society than classical Athens, because the term *phernē* is often used for the wealth of the brides in Ptolemaic papyri of the third century BCE (Wolff 1957: 169; Yiftach-Firanko 2003: 297, 305). Wolff argues that the *phernē* was delivered by the wife herself, rather than by her *kyrios*, normally her husband, as was the case with the Athenian *proix*. In recent studies no difference between Ptolemaic *phernē* and classical *proix* is made by Vêrilhac and Vial (1999: 52–70) and Yiftach-Firanko (2003: 124). His conclusion: “The value of the Ptolemaic dowry points to a much more significant role than simply providing for the wife’s personal needs, rather, it laid the foundations of the family fortune and its economic life immediately after the formation of marriage.” The argument of the French scholar Louis Gernet goes in the opposite direction. Although he considers the *phernē* as the trousseau of the bride, he combines it with the prestige of the whole *oikos*. For him, the *phernē* functions as a sign of the *prestige nobilitaire* in archaic times (Gernet 1937: 398; cf. Vernant 1981: 62; Mossé 1985). Among Anglo-Saxon scholars, socioeconomic interpretations dominate. David Schaps, who does not see any social difference between *phernē* and *proix*, has argued that

the Solonian law was geared toward controlling competition among the elite families in ancient Athens (Schaps 1979: 79, 100–103; see also Vérilhac and Vial 1999: 137). According to his colleague David Asheri, the law deals with textiles, because transfer of land was forbidden (Asheri 1963: 14–15). Robin Lane Fox has argued that controlling the concentration of landed property was the major aim of the Solonian law; he sees the prohibition of dowry as an additional regulation aimed at controlling competition among the families of the upper class (Lane Fox 1985: 224). More recently, Claudine Leduc has proposed the interpretation of the Solonian law as an act to stop the traditional custom of dividing land for the benefit of daughters (Leduc 1991: 309): “La *phernē* représente l’apport de certaines mariées d’autrefois et cet apport est constitué de terre. En interdisant les *phernas*, Solon a, peut-être, mis fin à une procédure qui segmentait la terre au profit des filles.” Whereas the *phernē* is considered here as part of the inheritance system, David Ogden has suggested that the garments were worn by the brides themselves during the ceremony (Ogden 2002).

The discussion is characterized by several misunderstandings. First, value is associated with land rather than with textiles. Second, the figure “three” is taken as hinting at a restriction of the number of clothes, rather than as denoting a large number of goods. Third, textiles are not recognized as female property.

An Anthropological Approach

When one considers the display of cloth in the context of rituals such as weddings or life-cycle ceremonies in non-European societies, cloth acquires a completely different value. Since Weiner’s studies of the ceremonial exchange of cloth at the classical places of anthropological field work in Oceania in the 1970s – according to Weiner’s observation, in Samoa, each distribution of cloth is an example of negotiation and validation of rank and power (Weiner and Schneider 1989) – a new generation of anthropologists has found similar practices in other societies. I would like to refer to Willemijn de Jong’s research on “Cloth as Marriage Gifts” in Indonesia in the 1990s (de Jong 1994, 1998, 2000) to reopen the discussion and to propose a new reading of the Solonian law. The Swiss scholar has studied the marriage customs of the Lio in central Flores. Their society is characterized by a system of ranks which divides the population into three groups with different marriage customs. The “high-ranking people, who descend from founding clans of the *adat* communities,” and the “middle-ranking people, who descend from clans that settled afterwards” (the low-ranking people descend from former slaves), prefer to marry by formal courtship. This starts with a betrothal ceremony and is followed by an exchange of bride-wealth presented by the groom’s family and reciprocated by gifts given by the family of the bride. Gifts of the groom are jewelry and animals; gifts of the bride are cloth and food. Let us take a look at the rituals and the number of goods exchanged at the wedding of a high-ranking family in 1995 (de Jong 1998: 453). Three pieces of textile are

given by the bride's family at the betrothal ceremony in return for the animals and the money given as bride-wealth by the groom's family. At the big bride-wealth ceremony much more is given: forty-two pieces of cloth and rice on the one side, a pair of golden ear-drops, eleven animals – horses, pigs, goats – and money on the other side. The little bride-wealth ceremony takes place just before the wedding; after this the wedding ceremony follows with an exchange of textiles for the bride and animals for the groom. De Jong counts thirty-three animals and forty-nine pieces of cloth altogether. The high number of textile items is a new development (de Jong 1998: 453).

In 1910, in the colonial period, the highest-ranking families exchanged up to twenty pairs of traditional golden ear-drops for three pieces of cloth at bride-wealth ceremonies. Nowadays no more than three pairs of ear-drops are reciprocated by about fifty or one hundred pieces of cloth (de Jong 1994: 170). This development does not mean that cloth has lost its value. The ability to purchase machine-spun thread and to sell cloth in the market has led to an increase in the production of cloth (de Jong 1994: 179).

The custom in Indonesia is not understandable unless one considers the productive role of the woman, her task to produce cloth. One-third of a whole year's the production – nowadays fifteen pieces of cloth – is used for ceremonial purposes. The other pieces serve as clothing and as commodities to be sold in the market. The high number of pieces of cloth that are exchanged at wedding ceremonies is not only a sign of the bride's wealth, but also, and primarily, a result of the number of female relatives who honor her by presenting textiles for her wedding ceremony. While some of the textiles and animals will form part of the equipment of the new household, the other gifts will be given to the groom's and bride's relatives and will create a new social bond between them. The public display of cloth wealth at the wedding ceremonies presents in visible form the prestige and the position of the new couple within the social network of their village (de Jong 2000).

De Jong's analysis of the gift-exchange ceremonies of the first two groups conveys an idea of the value of cloth in nonindustrial societies. The weaving of cloth, and of patterned cloth in particular, is very time-consuming. In some villages in Indonesia jewelry is usually given for a bride with special skills in *ikat* weaving. In former times, high-ranking women held a monopoly on certain *ikat* motifs, a monopoly which is now lost because of access to the synthetic dyes that were introduced in the 1970s. But up until the present day, bride-wealth without gold jewelry is valued less (de Jong 1998).

The Meaning of the Solonian *phernē*: Some Theses

That the pieces of cloth presented as wedding gifts are three in number has a striking similarity to the number "three" of the Solonian *tria himatia* transferred in the context of marriage. This gives rise to new questions. What did Solon actually

regulate? Did he really minimize the size of the dowry? The anthropological example tells a different story:

- (1) Three pieces of cloth must be seen as items of high value.
- (2) Textiles represent female wealth.
- (3) This wealth functions as a female counter gift to male gifts.

I would therefore argue that the law deals with female gifts presented to reciprocate male gifts, which may be jewelry or animals or even land. If this interpretation is correct, then the Solonian custom would belong to the Homeric customs of giving bride-wealth, which I have analyzed elsewhere (Wagner-Hasel 1988, 2000: 141–51, 2002: 23). I would like to develop my argument in more detail.

The Value of Cloth: Patterns and Colors

New research has proved the value of ancient textiles. According to recent studies on textile work by Elizabeth Barber (1991), Rosa Reuthner (2006), and Ellen Harlizius-Klück (2004), even the ancient loom technique, the use of the warp-weighted loom, allows pattern weaving. In particular, the use of the heading band made the creation of complicated patterns possible. A reconstruction of such a loom was built for an exhibition in Munich in 2006 (Kader 2006). The heading band or selvedge was produced by what is known as tablet (British) or card (American) weaving (Harlizius-Klück 2004: 106). According to Harlizius-Klück, whose studies included philosophy, textile art, and mathematics, weaving “with its planned beginning of dividing the warp threads into even and uneven threads and with the possibility of repeating plans and production of patterns and pictures,” supplies a first rational worldview (Harlizius-Klück 2004: 126). Contrary to the assumptions made in the nineteenth century, when skill was mistakenly equated with professionalism and occupation, we have reason to assume that the production of patterned clothing remained largely in the domestic sphere and was in the hands of the women (Reuthner 2006). Spinning was very time-consuming. On the basis of experimental archaeology, Eva Anderson and Marie Louise Nosch have shown that under the condition of ancient spinning and weaving technology, spinning the thread for one piece of cloth required more than 195 days. A thread sixteen kilometers in length is needed to weave a four-meter piece of cloth like the *himation* (Anderson and Nosch 2003). In addition, one has to consider that pattern-weaving was also very time-consuming. Although Hans van Wees has recently argued that homemade textiles lost their value because of imports from Asia, Milesian cloaks for example (van Wees 2005), the skill of Greek wives in producing fine textiles was valued not only in the epics but also in classical time, as Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and the Attic orators prove (for references see Loftus 1998; Reuthner 2006; Bundrick 2008). References to imports of foreign cloth such as the Milesian cloaks, which we find in the books by Athenaeus or Diodorus, should be read with caution.

When Diodorus tells us that “in Syracuse a drive to limit conspicuous consumption led to a ban on ‘Milesian-style cloaks’ for men” (Diodorus 12.21.1; see van Wees 2005: 49), this may also be read as a reference to homemade cloth woven with Milesian wool. Such a reading was proposed almost a century ago by the German scholar Karl Bücher, who warned against an interpretation of the Milesian cloaks as real imports (Bücher 1922: 39–45; cf. Wagner-Hasel 2011: 203–9). And indeed, wool markets and the purchase of wool are well attested by many ancient authors from Aristophanes (*Ran.* 1346–51) to Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.7) and Theocritus (*Poeta bucolicus* 15.20). Greek interest in foreign patterns and fine wool qualities can be traced back to the Homeric epics. As the modern Indonesian example shows, this interest need not be associated with a devaluation of female weaving.

Female Wedding Gifts

In the epics the bride receives gifts of jewelry and clothes from her groom, called *dōra*, whereas her family receives cattle and sheep, called *hedna*. In the case of both types of gifts, the man gains access to the textiles woven by the wife and her maidens (Wagner-Hasel 1988). The gift of the bride is called *charis*. In Book 11 of the *Iliad*, the poet reminds us of the fate of Iphidamas, who died at Troy and had “seen no *charis*” from his bride, although he had given a great deal of bride-wealth: one hundred cattle and numerous sheep (Hom. *Il.* 11.242–45). *Charis* denotes the gift presented in reciprocation and is often translated as “gratitude” or “service” or “favor” (Scheid-Tissinier 1994: 35–36, 258–59). The term occurs in all central relationships based on reciprocity, whether in the relationship between warriors, couples, or more precisely, members of the household community, or the relationship between people and the gods (Wagner-Hasel 2000: 131–65). In the case of the bride of Iphidamas, *charis* means thankfulness for the bride-wealth and must be seen as part of the reciprocal relationship between married couples and their families (Wagner-Hasel 2000: 141, 142; 2002; McNeil 2005). The gifts of the groom are denoted by a different term in the epics: *hedna*. As soon as the groom had given the *hedna*, the bride would move into the groom’s house. Therefore Rudolf Köstler (1950: 48, 60) – he was the first scholar who interpreted Homeric marriages not in terms of purchase but of gift-giving – called them “Heimführungsgaben” (literally, “gifts for leading her to his home”). These *hedna* were probably just herds of cattle and sheep, like the gifts of Iphidamas mentioned in the extract quoted above. While these *hedna* probably pass into the hands of the bride’s father, the woman courted receives gifts of jewelry and clothes, called *dōra*, from her groom, as did Penelope from her suitors. This is the case when Penelope appears before her suitors shrouded in a shining veil. Her splendid appearance excites sexual desire and also serves as an invitation to give gifts, that is, jewelry. The suitors, who wish to lie beside her, are eager to present gifts; among them ear-drops, as in the Indonesian example: “Now when the fair lady reached the wooers she stood by the doorpost of the well-built hall, holding before her face her shining

veil (*lipara krēdemna*), and the faithful handmaids stood on either side of her. Straightway when the knees of the wooers were loosened and their heart enchanted with love, and they all prayed each that he might lie by her side" (Homer *Od.* 18.208–14). Here sexual desire is associated with skillfully woven fabrics, the future gifts of the bride. The beauty of the mistress and her ability to weave patterned textiles is often stressed by the epic poets (Wagner-Hasel 2000: 156–59). In the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* it is not only the physical beauty of the goddess but also the splendor of her clothing that excites sexual desire in Anchises (*Hymn. Hom. Aphr.* 85–91; see Wagner-Hasel 2002: 21–22). The precious patterned textiles produced by the wife and her maidens are important gifts, which are necessary for the male elite wishing to practice guest-friendship and to demonstrate the status of the high-ranking families (for references see Wagner-Hasel 2000: 104–30). The giver is always a woman. In the *Odyssey*, Helena is said to have given a patterned *peplos*, woven by herself, to Telemachos as a gift for his future bride (Hom. *Od.* 15.54). In a poem by Bacchylides, the Attic hero Theseus receives a golden *kalymma* from the Nereides and a purple cloak from Amphitrite (Bacchylides 17 [ed. Snell and Maehler 1970]; see Waldner 2000: 206–13). These textile gifts refer to a further semantic dimension of *charis*, that of "grace." The disparate meanings of *charis* assume a common meaning, if *charis* is regarded from a technical point of view. In her study on the meaning of *charis*, Bonnie MacLachlan has attempted to reduce the different meanings to a common idea and has defined *charis* as reciprocal "social pleasure" (1993: 4–7, 52). I prefer to apply "social pleasure" to concrete subjects, especially to brightly patterned weavings. These fit all cases of *charis*, the service as well as thanks for the service, favor, and grace. This last meaning of *charis* should be understood as a light or a visual power that radiates from colored weaving or from the jewelry given to the desired woman. One of the gifts, an ear-pendant that Penelope receives from her suitors, radiates *charis* (*Od.* 19.210–14). The different meanings of female *charis* find their representation in the divine weavers of cloth (Hom. *Il.* 5.338) and in the goddesses of grace and reciprocity (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.1133A4–5), the *Charites*, that is, the Graces (Wagner-Hasel 2002).

Understanding textiles as female gifts offered to reciprocate male bride-wealth gives us an idea of how the change from the practices of bride-wealth to dowry occurred. Although the classical *proix* seems to belong to a different system (Vérilhac and Vial 1999; Stavrianopoulou 2006), the value of textiles did not diminish in classical times. The importance of female weaving is proved by the law of Gortyn, which contains the regulation that in the case of divorce the wife must leave half of the pieces of cloth which she has produced during her marriage: "And if a husband and wife should be divorced, she is to have her own property which she came with to her husband and half of the produce, if there were any from her own property, and half of whatever she has woven within, whatever there may be, plus five *stateres* if the husband be the cause of the divorce; but if the husband should declare that he is not the cause, the judge is to decide on oath" (Law Code of Gortyn col. II 45 [ed. Willetts 1967]). The dotal inscriptions of Mykonos and Tenos clearly distinguish between money and textiles, as Stavrianopoulou has recently shown in her

study of Hellenistic women. To quote just a few examples: The daughter of Sostratos, named Xanthe, receives a dowry of 1,300 drachmas, including cloth worth 200 drachmas. The bridegroom of Dikaie, named Pappias, confirms the size of the dowry that Ktesonides has given to his sister: 1,000 silver drachmas and cloth worth 500 drachmas (Stavrianopoulou 2006: 62). The situation in Athens seems to have been quite similar. In a speech the Attic orator Isaeus tells of Menekles who gave the dowry (*proix*) to the groom of his former wife, Eleios of Spettios, besides the *himatia*, which were hers (Isaeus 2.9).² Two questions remain to be reexamined: Can wives be seen as owners of their dowries? And what is the precise nature of the rituals of gift-giving in the context of weddings?

We know of several gift-giving ceremonies during the wedding in classical times. The interpretation of the *phernē* as countergift may help us to understand some other transactions involving textiles in the context of marriage which the ancient lexicographer Pollux mentions. He knows that in classical Athens the bride sends a *chlanis*, a fine cloak, to her groom, a custom that seems to belong to a ritual of gift-exchange, as suggested by the Indonesian example. According to Pollux, the ritual is called “the *apaulia* when the bridegroom sleeps apart from the bride at the house of the father-in-law. ... The *chlanis* of the *epaulia* is sent by the bride to the groom at the *apaulia*” (Pollux *Onom.* 3.39–40; trans. after Oakley and Sinos 1993: 31). On his side the bridegroom presents gifts to the bride. They are called *hedna*, like the Homeric bride-wealth, or *optēria*, and are associated with the unveiling of the bride, the *anakalyptēria* (Pollux *Onom.* 2.59; 3.36).

The information from Pollux and the presentation of the *anakalyptēria* on Attic vase paintings suggest several acts of gift-giving, not only between bride and groom but also between the bride and her female relatives (Oakley and Sinos 1993: 25–26, figs. 60–61; 35–42; Llewellyn-Jones 2003: 227–47; Gherchanoc 2006, 2009). The popularity and prominence of scenes of adorning the bride and of the procession of the veiled bride to the bridal chamber in Attic vase painting seem to confirm the importance of displaying cloth at weddings (Oakley and Sinos 1993: 28). Sheramy Bundrick has recently argued (Bundrick 2008) that even the motif of the money pouch, normally associated with prostitution, that is, the purchase of the service of the *hetaira* (Hartmann 2002: 173–79), refers to the married couple. Some vases depict a woman spinning confronted by a man with a money pouch. According to Bundrick the money pouch refers to the status of the man as citizen and to his prosperous house. Whilst the money pouch symbolizes the contribution of the husband to the household, the wool basket hints at the economic role of the wife (Bundrick 2008: 300). The male gift of a money pouch can be replaced by other objects, such as raw wool. Some vases show a male person, probably the husband, who is bringing raw wool to his wife sitting in a chair, beside a basket, *kalathos*, filled with wool, and holding a ball of wool in her hand (Bundrick 2008: 306). This is Bundrick’s interpretation of a *pyxis* (470–460 BCE) from Athens: “A woman wrapped in her *himation* sits before a *kalathos* filled with wool (indicated in added white), holding a ball of wool in her hand. A young man, presumably the husband, stands on the other side of the *kalathos*, a leg of meat in his right hand and a ball

of wool in his left, the latter extended toward the seated woman. The leg of meat recalls the meat obtained from public sacrifices that could be brought home and eaten, with both meat and wool demonstrating the capabilities of the husband to look after his family. A pair of closed doors emphasizes the house setting” (Bundrick 2008: 306, 307, fig. 10). If Bundrick’s interpretation is correct, then female as well as male gifts do indeed hint at the future cooperation of the couple.

When philosophers such as Plato propose to restrict dowries, they mention only gifts of cloth (*esthētes*) which should be graded according to the class of income ranging between 50 drachmas and two minas (Pl. *Leg.* 774d). I propose the thesis that the classical dowry has its roots in the female gifts offered as counter-gifts to the male bride-wealth. Homeric gift-giving goes on in classical times although it changes its face.

Conclusion

Once again, then: What is it that Solon actually did regulate? If we interpret the *phernē* as female counter-gift for male bride-wealth, what will the number “three” tell us? Weddings as well as funerals are decisive events that create bonds of obligation by rituals of gift-giving and communal feasting. One may argue that the aim of the law was to cut the bond of obligation by restrictions of gift-giving and consumption. But we have learned that three garments are of high value. The idea of a restriction of female gifts or dowry does not fit with the time-consuming production of textiles in nonindustrial societies. And apart from that we do not know whether the garments are part of a ceremonial gift-giving and represent only the opening gift of the bride to the future husband. Therefore I prefer a different solution. I propose to read the Solonian regulation of the *phernē* as part of the reorganization of the body of community, of his timocratic order. Solon divided the citizens into four classes of income of grain wealth with different access to political participation (Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 18) and integrated the former dependent people, the *hektemorioi* or *thētes*, into the citizens’ body (Ando 1988). This meant a break with the caste system, which continued to exist in other regions such as Laconia, Crete, and Thessaly. In Sparta, a deep divide between the warrior caste, the Spartans, and the farmer caste, the helots, separated the different classes.³ The reorganization of the citizens’ body in Athens, the precise date of which is under discussion (Raaflaub 2006), pushed the process of democratization there. Such a process of integration has its effects on the political identity and demands new norms for everybody. “Civic identity could not be taken for granted; it had to be constructed and reconstructed in each generation by shared myths, by participation in cults, festivals, and ceremonies, and by elaborate techniques of ‘mixing.’” (Connor 1998: 41). Elke Hartmann (2000: 385–87) has shown how the aristocratic practice of using the services of the *hetaira* spread among the poorer people in the fifth century BCE in Athens. The wedding ceremonies offer an excellent possibility of creating such common norms and of visualizing participation in a common civic culture. Under

the conditions of economic inequality the number “three” can be read as the common norm for different classes. The law does not say anything about colors or qualities of wool; it only deals with the number of pieces of cloth. Every member of the citizenry, poor or rich, could fulfil the norm of *tria himatia*. Since the sixth century BCE, the idea of a numerically based order to the cosmos had been widespread in philosophy. Philosophers such as Pythagoras and even Plutarch considered “three” as a perfect number symbolizing the beginning, the middle, and the end, or past, present, and future (Plut. *Mor.* 738 F; Wagner-Hasel 2009). The display of cloth during wedding ceremonies, then, represented not only the prestige of the bride and her family but also common values of the society that is the cooperation within the household as well as the belonging to a larger community, the *polis*.

Although there are good reasons to suppose an economic background to wedding gifts, the social and symbolic dimensions must be taken into consideration. Therefore I would not like to argue against the view of Marcel Mauss who stressed the social dimension of giving gifts. But I am sure that the social and symbolic dimensions are not understandable without considering the economic use of gift-giving practices.

Notes

- 1 Snodgrass 1974 has argued that the dowry system goes back to Homeric times.
- 2 On *chrysia kai himatia* as (additional?) parts of the dowry, see also Demosthenes 41.27–28. The philological question is whether textiles are thought to be included in or excluded from the *proix*. See Schaps 1979, Appendix III: Dowry and Trousseau. For the *proix* as land, see now Cox 1998: 76, 116–20. For analogies in modern Greece, see Friedl 1963.
- 3 There are good reasons to suppose that at Athens a similar caste system existed. The Attic hero Theseus was said to have divided the people of Attica into three classes (Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 25): the *eupatridai*, the *geomoroi* (the farmers), and the *demiourgoi* (craftsmen). According to Plutarch (*Vit. Sol.* 23), the old Attic *phylai* did not represent military units like the ten *phylai* of Kleisthenes in the fifth century BCE but groups defined by their skills: the *hopletes* (warriors), the *argadeis* (workers), the *teleontes* (dependent farmers who pay a *telos*=a due), the *aigikoreis* (herdsmen). In contrast to these systems, the Solonian timocratic order is not grounded on birth but on wealth in terms of grain. See Foxhall 1997.

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Further Reading

For a study of gifts to the bride in classical Athens, see Gherchanoc 2009. She differentiates between gifts of the female relatives, especially of the bride's mother, and gifts of the groom and the bride's father. The meaning of *charis* as female counter gifts for male gifts is analyzed in Wagner-Hasel 2002. This concept is used by McNeil 2005. For a new discussion of the dowry system in ancient Greece, see Stavrianopoulou 2006. For an illustrative study of the iconographic references to textile gifts, see Bundrick 2008.

Charity Wounds: Gifts to the Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism

GREGG E. GARDNER

Introduction¹

Gifts and gift-giving were important features of the Mediterranean world in late antiquity. Their significance is reflected in early rabbinic literature, the so-called Tannaitic corpus of legal and exegetical texts redacted in Roman Palestine in the third century CE. There are over 250 references to gifts in these texts, including gifts for priests (*t. Demai* 2.7–8; *t. Pe'ah* 2.13; Jaffee 1981), gifts for bridegrooms (*t. Pe'ah* 4.16; Satlow 2001), and those given in contemplation of death (*m. Pe'ah* 3.7; *m. B. Bat.* 9.6; Yaron 1960).² The rabbis also discuss gifts to the poor, which can be classified into two groups. The first are those given at harvest time, including produce that grows in the corner of the field (*pe'ah*), accidentally falls during the harvest (gleanings, *leqet*), or is overlooked or “forgotten” (*shikhehah*) by the harvester (*m. Pe'ah*; *t. Pe'ah* 1.1–4.7).³ Although identified seemingly by chance, the rabbis understand these items to have been differentiated from the rest of the crop for the poor by divine will. The rabbis instruct the harvester to refrain from interfering with the differentiation and allocation of these items, as they are meant to be gifts to the poor directly from God (Gardner 2009: 16–41).

The second group of gifts to the poor, which is the focus of this paper, consists of items given by other humans – *ṣedaqah*, or charity. How are gifts to the poor from other humans conceptualized in early rabbinic legal texts?⁴ What social, economic, religious, and legal dynamics were at play? How should one give and what were the ethics of gift-giving, as prescribed by the rabbis? Are gifts and charity compatible concepts? Because the rabbis understand giving to the poor as the

fulfillment of an obligation toward God, answering these questions will shed light on what Ilana Silber calls in her paper in this volume “religious giving,” whereby patterns of giving are framed by religious structures.⁵ The significance of understanding discourses on charity in the earliest texts of rabbinic Judaism was recognized by Mauss himself:

We can even date from the Mishnaic era ... the time when the doctrine of charity and alms was born, which, with Christianity and Islam, spread around the world. It was at this time that the word *zedāqā* [*ṣedaqah*] changed its meaning, because in the Bible it did not mean alms. (Mauss 1990: 18)⁶

Through a careful examination of early rabbinic legal texts and drawing on theoretical approaches to gifts and gift-giving, I find that the conflation of gifts and charity was at once useful and deeply problematic for the early rabbis or Tannaim. The gift’s legal and economic attributes – it constituted an unpaid or free surrender of assets – make it an ideal vessel by which one individual (in these texts, the rabbis envision both givers and recipients as men) can transfer ownership over an asset to another individual without any material compensation in return. It can be characterized as giving that is “asymmetric,” a concept discussed in this volume by Ilana Silber and Zeba Crook. Such unilateral gifts make possible the redistribution of assets that undergirds the religious obligation of *ṣedaqah*.

And yet, as Mary Douglas (1990) points out, charity wounds the poor. Giving without the expectation of material compensation in return concretizes and indexes the inequalities between the two parties. It leaves the recipient, Mauss writes, feeling inferior.⁷ Giving a gift without the expectation of a return removes the transaction from what is considered to be normal reciprocal behavior, which played an important role in the societies of the ancient Mediterranean. The negative social aspects of gifts may prompt their refusal by the poor – a problem that the early rabbis anticipate. The Tannaim address this problem by instructing benefactors to convert gifts into loans secured by pledges, an effort to cope with and ease the tensions inherent in the charitable gift. This enabled the poor to save face, maintaining at least the appearance of independence and a modicum of personal dignity. It completed the transaction, which, in turn, enabled the giver to fulfill his obligation of *ṣedaqah*. Because gifts were prone to creating dependency and other hierarchical relationships that challenged rabbinic ideals of an egalitarian Israelite society, converting the gift into a loan diminished this particular threat.

The Gift in Early Rabbinic Literature

In early rabbinic texts, gifts function as means to transfer ownership over assets from one individual to another.⁸ It is indicative of the rabbis’ understanding of gifts that they group them together with other forms of exchange, such as sales and barter exchanges. The boundaries between these categories were fluid, as one form

of exchange could be converted to another. Wages were converted into loans; barter into gift; gift into sale, and so on (*m. Ma'as. Š.* 1.1; *m. Šeb.* 10.1; *Sifre Deut.* 214; Yaron 1960: 21; Falk 1972–1978: 2:205). Gifts could also be converted into loans and vice versa. As with other forms of exchange, the transfer of a gift is finalized with an act of *qinyan*, or “acquisition,” after which the rights of the new owner are enforceable in the court system envisioned by the rabbis.⁹ It is notable that whereas anthropologists often draw sharp distinctions between gifts and commodities, their bifurcation is less pronounced in rabbinic texts.¹⁰

What distinguishes gift-giving from other forms of exchange is the absence of compensation. Giving a gift is a unilateral dispossession, a free or unpaid surrender of an asset, brought about by the cooperation of two parties (Yaron 1960: 21, 32; Wagner-Hasel 2003: 146–47, 150–59). A gift is “free” in the sense that it does not require material compensation. Unlike a sale, no money is paid. Unlike barter, no goods are provided in return. Unlike a loan, gifts do not require surety. For these reasons, it is commonplace for scholars to characterize gifts in rabbinic literature as simply sales without payment – a taxonomy that fails to account for the important qualities that make gift-giving a significant social practice.¹¹

As a means to transfer ownership over an asset without compensation in return, the gift is the best available vessel – at least, from legal and economic standpoints – to perform the redistributive functions on which *ṣedaqah* rests. *Ṣedaqah* is defined by the Tannaim as monetary or material support for the living poor (*t. Pe'ah* 4.19). Unlike *gemilut hasadim* (“acts of kindness”), *ṣedaqah* excludes nonmaterial support, such as personal service. That *ṣedaqah* is for the living excludes beneficent acts for the dead, such as burial. *Ṣedaqah*, moreover, is exclusively for the poor, understood to be needy adult men (*t. Pe'ah* 4:10). An altruistic deed performed for a wealthy individual would not be considered *ṣedaqah* by the Tannaim. Nor, for that matter, would donations to synagogues, maintenance of widows and orphans, or similar acts.¹² While these endeavors may be considered altruistic, they are not “charity” in the strict sense set forth by the Tannaim.

The fulfillment of the obligation of *ṣedaqah*, therefore, rested on the redistribution of assets to poor individuals. The poor, by definition, lacked the resources to compensate; indeed, compensation or payment for charity would have made little sense.¹³ As such, the legal and economic dimensions of gifts, namely, their ability to transfer ownership rights without payment or compensation in return – an “unpaid surrender” – made the gift a useful vehicle for redistributing assets as fulfillment of *ṣedaqah*.

Problems with Giving a Gift as Charity

While the legal and economic dimensions of the gift served charity well, the fact that no compensation was required – or even expected – was deeply problematic from a social perspective.¹⁴ Like most societies, those of the ancient Mediterranean world held to what Alvin Gouldner calls the “norm of reciprocity,” which entails

an obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate (Gouldner 1960). As Mauss notes, the acceptance of a gift generates an obligation for the recipient to give a gift in return (Mauss 1990: 82). A failure to reciprocate, Emerson writes, leaves the recipient feeling inferior and “vexatious” that his independence has been invaded (Emerson 1844: 537). He would be subject to humiliation, shame, embarrassment, or subservient clientage. Read and Sahllins liken the gift to a debt that leaves the recipient in a subordinate position until he reciprocates (Read 1959: 429; Sahllins 1972: 208).

Just as a failure to reciprocate harms the recipient, however, so too does the absence of an expectation to reciprocate. This is the case for gifts given as charity, as the would-be almsgiver proffers the gift under the assumption that the recipient is to provide nothing material in return. The absence of goods or services in return indexes and reinforces the status inequality between the two individuals, as Mauss explains: “The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it” (Mauss 1990: 65). And likewise Mary Douglas:

Charity is meant to be a free gift, a voluntary, unrequited surrender of resources. Though we laud charity as a Christian virtue, we know that it wounds. ... There should not be any free gifts. What is wrong with the so-called free gift is the donor’s intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties. Once given, the free gift entails no further claims from the recipient. (Douglas 1990: ix)

Because the expectation to reciprocate reflects equality, the lack of an expectation reinforces and indexes inequality (Komter 2005: 28–29).

Emerson, in an essay penned in 1844 and characterized by Mauss as “curious” (Mauss 1990: 65), likewise points to the damage that seemingly altruistic giving can cause:

The law of benefits is a difficult channel, which requires careful sailing, or rude boats. It is not the office of a man to receive gifts. How dare you give them? We wish to be self-sustained. We do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten. We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourself; but not from any one who assumes to bestow. (Emerson 1844: 536)

Emerson emphasizes the recipient’s desire to maintain his or her economic independence and avoid dependency.

The last words of the quote from Emerson, “but not from anyone who *assumes* to bestow” [my emphasis], highlight the importance and power of the would-be giver’s intentions. Barry Schwartz, exploring the psychological significance of the gift, shows that gifts impose identities upon the giver and recipients. The gifts themselves “reveal an important secret: the idea which the recipient evokes in the imagination of the giver” (B. Schwartz 1967: 2). His argument can be applied to the case at hand, as an individual who offers a gift without the expectation of a

return identifies himself as a benefactor and reveals that he believes the other party to be poor and in need of support from others. It is a unilateral move, as the benefactor injures an individual by perceiving him to be one who would seek or accept a relationship of social dependency. These otherwise intangible attitudes and identities are objectified, concretized, and advertised by the gift itself.¹⁵ The issue of time and timing is also significant, as the poor are smitten with shame and subordination at the very moment in which the gift is offered without the expectation of reciprocation. One who reckons himself a benefactor wields alms like a knife – at any moment, he may strike an individual with his offer, wounding his dignity and social standing.¹⁶ Mauss writes: “Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver” (Mauss 1990: 65). Likewise, Immanuel Kant writes, “Almsgiving is a form of kindness associated with pride and costing no trouble. ... Men are demeaned by it” (Kant 2001: 208–9). There are no free gifts, as the poor pay with a loss of dignity and honor when offered a gift without the expectation of a reciprocal return.¹⁷

Gift-giving and the reciprocity that it entails was a central element of the wider world in which the rabbis lived. This norm of reciprocity lay at the heart of “Mediterraneanism” and was relied upon for the proper functioning of the Roman Empire (S. Schwartz 2010). Gifts create relationships of personal dependency, hierarchical structures that were inimical to the rabbinic ideal that all Israelites (male, at least) were ostensibly equal to one another (Baron 1952: 2:288; Lapin 1995: 239–41; S. Schwartz 2010: 26–27). The mere offer of charity was enough to wound, as it reflected the giver’s lowly perception of the potential recipient. It is with these tensions that the rabbis had to cope and provide viable solutions for their audience on how to discharge the obligation of *ṣedaqah* incumbent upon them.

Rejecting the Gift

To protect himself, the poor man can reject the gift. Rejection arrests the kind of identity construction described by Barry Schwartz, denying the would-be giver’s identification of the would-be recipient as a charity case. To accept a gift is to accept an identity, while to reject a gift is to reject a definition of oneself (B. Schwartz 1967: 3). The rabbis anticipate the rejection, reflecting their awareness of and sensitivity to the problems that gifts can create.¹⁸ They discuss rejection in *t. Pe’ah* 4.12, which is part of rabbinic literature’s earliest extended discourse on charity (*t. Pe’ah* 4.8–21).¹⁹

[Regarding] one who says, “I shall not be maintained from the belongings of others.”

They are persistent with him²⁰ and maintain him [by] giving him [aid] as a loan (*milveh*).

But [when he cannot repay], they return²¹ and give [it] to him as a gift – the words of Rabbi Meir.

But the sages say, “They give [it] to him as a gift. [If he refuses]²² then they return and give [it] to him as a loan (*milveh*).”²³

Rabbi Shimon says, “They say to him, ‘Bring a pledge!’ in order to persuade him.”²⁴

In the case at hand, one has offered charity as a gift – that is, without the expectation of compensation or reciprocation. The poor man’s response, that he refuses to be supported by others, signals that he understands the offer as an intrusion upon his economic independence. In the ancient world, a man’s ability to support himself and his household (wife, children, slaves, and animals) was necessary to secure a place in society. This is likewise reflected in rabbinic literature, which envisions society as a web of interactions between the male heads of households. As such, economic independence was understood as a prerequisite for full participation in society.²⁵ For these reasons, the rabbis praise those who avoid dependency, especially if they are truly in need. We see this, for example, in the Mishnah’s discussion of the identity of a poor individual:

And he who needs to take [*pe’ah*, gleanings, forgotten things, and so on] but does not take, will not die of old age until he supports others from that which is his.

On this it is written: *Blessed are those [who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord]* (Jer 17:7; trans. NRSV). (*m. Pe’ah* 8.9)²⁶

This passage invokes principles of “measure-for-measure” (*middah ke-neged middah*, or talion), in which a punishment or reward is equivalent to the deed.²⁷ The poor man who avoids dependency demonstrates the trust in God set out in Jeremiah 17:7 and will be richly rewarded with a reversal of fortune; he will become wealthy enough to support his household as well as others. This passage reflects both rabbinic disapproval of dependency, which is at best an unavoidable reality, as well as high regard for those who seek to preserve their independence. Thus, the rabbis are sympathetic to the disposition of the poor and find a solution that inflicts less harm.

The rejection of the gift, however, also has legal (*halakhic*) ramifications. In rabbinic thought, a gift can only be given if one individual is willing to relinquish ownership and the other is willing to accept it.²⁸ That the parties have attained mutual volition is signified by an act of *qinyan*, or “acquisition,” whereby a person voluntarily obtains legal rights. An act of *qinyan* concludes the transaction by signifying that ownership over the property has passed from one individual to another.²⁹ It follows that *qinyan* concretizes the giver’s identity as a benefactor and the recipient as a beneficiary.

And yet, no one can be forced to accept a gift against his or her wishes. Because the recipient is thought to profit from the gift (at least, from an economic perspective) silence would be understood as tacit acceptance and sufficient for *qinyan* (Yaron 1960: 21, 135; Falk 1972–1978: 2:198–99). To reject the gift the potential donee must actively make his feelings known (*t. B. Bat.* 8.1).³⁰ By stating, “I shall not be maintained by others,” the individual refuses the gift and cancels the

transaction. The poor's refusal of the gift is compelled by a fear of public disgrace and diminution, a loss of dignity. These feelings are reflected throughout rabbinic texts and find parallels in the Roman concept of *pudor*, which was a product of a sense of shame and socioethical discomfort stemming from an awareness of oneself as the constant focus of the moralizing gaze of the community. This sense of shame was antithetical to notions of honor, which were central to Roman and rabbinic values (Kaster 2005: 28–65; Langlands 2006: 18; S. Schwartz 2010: 140–41).

The rabbis, then, must cope with an essential tension. On the one hand, they are sympathetic to the poor's disposition, as they praise those who avoid dependency. On the other hand, the refusal of the gift has left the commandment of *śedaqah* unfulfilled. Further complicating the picture is that rejecting a gift can be a serious insult to the giver (Wagner-Hasel 2003: 146). Rejection is not only a way to defend one's identity and the way that he is perceived by others, but also a counterattack on the giver. Mauss observes that "to refuse to accept is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (Mauss 1990: 13; see also Bourdieu 1990: 100–101). Rejection refuses a relationship with the individual and denies the would-be giver's self-designation as a magnanimous benefactor, a status that carried a great deal of weight in Mediterranean societies.³¹

Perhaps for these reasons, the rabbinic redactors felt it necessary to encourage their audience to "be persistent" in their effort to complete the transaction and discharge their obligation.³² This is followed by instructions given in the name of Rabbi Meir, the prominent second-century CE sage. Meir instructs the householder to offer the poor man provisions as a loan, which would be converted to a gift when it cannot be repaid.³³ Meir's opinion, however, is rejected by the sages, who advocate the reverse sequence: the aid should be provided initially as a gift, and only when he refuses the gift should it be converted into a loan. Meir's contemporary, Rabbi Shimon, sides with the anonymous sages, adding that when the gift is converted into a loan, the householder should ask the poor to bring a pledge to secure the loan.

Why do the rabbinic authors and redactors suppose that the poor would be more likely to accept a loan than a gift? The answer can be found in an examination of loans in early rabbinic literature. Unlike today, loans were typically made by householders, as large-scale professional lenders were not prevalent in the Greco-Roman world. Loans were used, moreover, to supplement consumption, as borrowing to finance commercial ventures or create new sources of wealth was rare (Frier 1992: 424). Early rabbinic texts discuss two kinds of loans, a *she'elah* and a *milveh*.³⁴ In a *she'elah*, the object that is lent out is returned, for example animals and tools for preparing bread (Lapin 1995: 186–90). These can be thought of as "neighborly loans" in which individuals freely borrow and lend with one another (*m. B. Meši'a* 3.2; 7.8; 7.10; 8.1–3). They are envisioned as transactions among those who are equal in status, such as exchanges between householders or between women. The *she'elah* itself does not create status inequalities, as it neither elevates the lender nor subordinates the borrower (Lapin 1995: 188–90).

The *milveh*, which we find in the passage at hand, is a loan of money or some other fungible good. The borrower is not expected to return the object itself, but

rather the value of the object (Gulak 1913–1923: 2:170–72; Lapin 1995: 186). The lender may not charge interest, which the rabbis view as an instrument to exploit the immediate needs of another. When the lender receives more than he gives out, it creates inequalities that infringe upon the ideal that all Israelites are equal.³⁵ A *milveh* without interest maintains parity and equality between lenders and borrowers (Lapin 1995: 190 n. 50).

And yet, Tannaitic writings acknowledge the risk of default and recognize a lender's need to secure the loan, especially in the absence of interest.³⁶ One way to secure the loan would be for the debtor to put forward a guarantor, a third party who would guarantee payment. Another method would be to secure the loan with a *meshkon* or pledge (Gulak 1913–: 1: 164–65), which is the method recommended by Shimon in *t. Pe'ah* 4.12. Items that could serve as surety include landed property and moveable goods, such as produce.³⁷ In case of default, the lender simply acquires the pledged object and the transaction amounts to an equitable exchange of commodities (*m. Šeb.* 10.2; *t. Šeb.* 8.5–6; Falk 1972–1978: 2:207).

Whereas loans with interest create or reinforce hierarchical relationships, loans secured by pledges establish and maintain equity between the parties. Much like a contract, a pledge ensures the “predictability and calculability” of the return of a loan. In such cases, Bourdieu observes, the return is in a sense made – and the exchange complete – at the very moment that the loan is extended and the security provided (Bourdieu 1990: 105). A loan secured by a pledge amounts to an immediate and equitable exchange, akin to Sahlin's concept of “balanced reciprocity,” where reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received without delay (Sahlins 1972: 193–94). These transactions do not create hierarchical social relationships. By contrast, both the unsecured loan (which subordinates borrowers as debtors) and gifts (which initiate a process of unequal and delayed reciprocity) establish and maintain hierarchical relationships (Sahlins 1972: 194; Bourdieu 1990: 98–111).

This brings us back to our passage at hand, *t. Pe'ah* 4.12. The differences between Meir, on the one side, and the sages and Shimon, on the other, are cast into high relief by the role or work of time, which forces us to examine each discrete move as it unfolds in a certain sequence (Bourdieu 1990: 98–111). Meir offers a loan first and then a gift, while the sages offer aid as a gift and then as a loan. Meir's instruction presumes the passage of time, as the aid would be identified as a gift only after the poor default on the loan. In the interim, because Meir does not stipulate the provision of security for the loan, the transaction remains incomplete, and the poor man is in debt to the householder, relegating the borrower to a position of subordination. The sages, however, initially offer the aid as a gift. This identifies the individual as poor, potentially wounding him. The poor man, however, escapes injury by rejecting the gift. The giver then converts the provisions into a loan secured by a pledge. Providing collateral transfers ownership over the aid immediately and brings the deal to a close on terms that allow the recipient to save face and maintain some personal dignity.

At the same time, a loan secured by a pledge enables one to fulfill the obligation of *śedaqah*, which rests on the redistribution of assets. In early rabbinic literature,

pledges provided by the poor were subject to special rules. They belonged to the lender, but perhaps in name only. The Mishnah, for example, upholds and elaborates on the biblical rule that the pledge of a poor person must be returned so that the borrower may use it.³⁸ Abba Saul teaches that the lender may hire out a poor man's pledge so as to reduce his debt (*m. B. Meṣi'a* 6.7; Lapin 1995: 200). Distraint, seizing the borrower's property as payment of a debt, was reserved for extreme circumstances and could only be undertaken by a court. If the security is a basic necessity such as food or clothing, it may not be seized at all (Gulak 1913–1923: 1:164; Lapin 1995: 200). A poor man's pledge, therefore, may have been little more than a legal fiction that allows the normal misrecognition of gift-giving to be maintained, as the likelihood of distraint was slim to none. In short, converting the gift into a *milveh*-type loan secured by a pledge completed the transaction and redistributed resources, enabling the text's audience to fulfill the commandment of *ṣedaqah*. At the same time, such loans were perceived as exchanges between equals and were devoid of the social costs that encumber gifts and unsecured loans.

Conclusions

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss makes important observations on charitable giving, giving without the expectation of a return, and rejecting gifts. His comments on these issues, as well as their development and elaboration by subsequent scholars, have proven useful for understanding some of the earliest rabbinic discussions of *ṣedaqah*, which would become a central concept in rabbinic Judaism. For the early rabbis, I find that gifts were both useful and problematic means by which one could fulfill the obligation of *ṣedaqah*, or giving charity. From legal and economic perspectives, gifts constituted the free or unpaid surrender of ownership to another individual, making them well suited for the kind of compensation-free redistribution to the poor on which *ṣedaqah* rests. From anthropological and social perspectives, however, gifts tend to create personal dependency and other hierarchical relationships.³⁹ Gifts given without the expectation of compensation or reciprocation wounded the would-be recipient, which was antithetical to rabbinic ideals of an egalitarian Jewish society.

The Tannaim anticipate the poor's response, that they might reject the gift, demonstrating the rabbis' awareness of the social problems that gifts can cause. Their instructions to convert gifts into loans secured by a pledge demonstrates their regard for poor individuals, as the rabbis make an overt effort to allow them to save face and preserve a modicum of dignity. As material support for the poor, these provisions from humans reduce economic inequalities and enhance solidarity. Douglas, following Mauss, writes, "A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction" (Douglas 1990: vii). The rabbis recognize that charity wounds, and they seek to find a way to fulfill the obligation of *ṣedaqah* that reduces economic inequalities while maintaining the dignity of the recipient. Such interest in the dignity of the poor was a novel concept in the ancient world,

where the poor were often blamed for their own poverty and looked upon with scorn and derision (Whittaker 1993a).

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Carey A. Brown, Jordan D. Rosenblum, Michael L. Satlow, Daniel C. Ullucci, and one of the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and feedback on this paper. I alone am responsible for any remaining errors. All translations of rabbinic texts are my own. Abbreviations of the names of rabbinic texts are according to Alexander *et al.* 1999.
- 2 The word for “gift,” *mattanah*, appears 263 times in 154 different pericopae in Tannaitic compilations (Bar Ilan University [1972–2006]). Extrarabbinic sources on gifts and gift-giving in late-antique Jewish society include deeds of gifts (Rivlin 2005) and dedicatory inscriptions that record gifts to synagogues (Roth-Gerson 1987; S. Schwartz 2001; Levine 2005; Satlow 2005).
- 3 The rabbis devote the entire tractate of *m. Pe’ah* and its parallels in *t. Pe’ah* 1.1–4.7 to produce that is left for the poor at the harvest. They are based on biblical laws of support for the poor in Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22; and Deuteronomy 24:19–21, and identified as “gifts” to the poor in *t. Pe’ah* 2.13 and *t. Pe’ah* 2.18 – though these agricultural allotments are not identified as “gifts” in the Hebrew Bible.
- 4 On gift-giving in the aggadic rabbinic texts, see Galit Hasan-Rokem’s paper in this volume.
- 5 See also Silber 2000; 2002, where she expands on the concepts discussed briefly in Mauss 1990: 14–18.
- 6 The term *ṣedaqah* evolved from meaning “righteousness” in the Hebrew Bible to predominantly “charity” in rabbinic literature. To be sure, the rabbis were not the first to equate *ṣedaqah* with almsgiving, as this association is made already in texts from the Second Temple era. That the rabbis played a seminal role in the development of the concept, however, cannot be denied. On the history of the word *ṣedaqah*, see Rosenthal 1950–1951; Przybylski 1980; Hurvitz 1987; Ho 1991; Anderson 2009.
- 7 On Douglas and Mauss, see my discussion below under the heading “Problems with Giving a Gift as Charity.”
- 8 Gulak 1913–1923: 1:130, 59–61; Yaron 1960; Albeck 1976; Ben-Menahem 1995; Kochen 2004.
- 9 Gifts constitute a formidable claim to ownership, superseding other forms such as usucaption (*m. B. Bat.* 3.3). Only gifts given in contemplation of death do not require an act of *qinyan* for ownership to transfer; see Gulak 1913–1923: 1:130; Yaron 1960.
- 10 Following Polanyi’s influential work (Polanyi 1957: 72), commodities are often understood by anthropologists as items exchanged solely through market mechanisms, while gifts are nonmarket exchanges (Davis 1992: 7). For a critique of this dichotomy, see Parry and Bloch 1989: 1–32, esp. 8–12.
- 11 On the differences between reciprocity and economic exchange, see Ullucci 2011: 24–26. For gifts as sales without payments, see Gulak 1913–1923: 1:130, 59–61; Yaron 1960: 21. Early rabbinic texts often juxtapose sales and gifts, e.g., *Sifre Deut.* 194, 195, 214.
- 12 On contributions to synagogues, see the inscriptions in Roth-Gerson 1987 and their discussion in S. Schwartz 2001; Levine 2005; Satlow 2005. For spontaneous goodwill

offerings made to rabbis within Tannaitic compilations, see Cohen 1999: 934–35. It is only in later, Amoraic texts that we begin to see the “collection of the sages” – that is, organized charitable giving in support of rabbis and rabbinical students. Later texts also include support for widows and orphans within charitable giving (*Lev. Rab.* 37.2). See also *y. Meg.* 3.1, 74a where a rabbi collects funds for supporting widows and orphans, but distributes them to other rabbis; and *Esth. Rab.* 2.3 (to Esther 1:4); *Lev. Rab.* 34.16; *y. Hor.* 3.7 48a. On these Amoraic texts, see Levine 1989: 162–67; Satlow 2010: 246–49, 273 n. 109.

- 13 On *ṣedaqah* as a commandment (*mitsva*), see Novick 2008. On the early rabbinic definition of the poor, see *m. Pe'ah* 8.8–9; Hellinger 2004; Gardner 2009.
- 14 The scholarly discourse on the gift, initiated by Mauss 1990, is substantial. For recent evaluations, see Davis 1992; Parry and Bloch 1989; Sigaud 2002; Silber 2005; Wagner-Hasel 2003. For recent applications of aspects of this discourse to the fields of ancient Judaism and rabbinic literature, see Ben-Menahem 1995; Kochen 2004; Satlow 2005; S. Schwartz 2010.
- 15 Komter, drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, writes: “Gifts as ‘tie-signs’ disclose the nature of the tie between giver and recipient. They reveal how we perceive the recipient while at the same time showing something about our own identity” (Komter 2005: 7).
- 16 Commenting on the gifts to the poor mentioned in Esther 9:22, Novick likewise notes, “to aid the poor is, in a sense, to victimize them” (Novick 2010: 6).
- 17 Cf. Derrida 1992, for whom free gifts are inconceivable. It is notable that the phrase “free gift” appears in a handful of Tannaitic sources. *Sifre Deut.* 49 associates it with God’s grace; elsewhere, free gifts are those given outside the bounds of religious obligations, e.g., *m. Ma'as. Š.* 1.1; 3.1; *m. Šeb.* 8.5. For a treatment, see Ben-Menahem 1995: 98–104. I note that the rabbis do not identify free gifts as charity.
- 18 The rabbis also discuss the implications of unwanted or unclaimed gifts to the poor from God in *t. Pe'ah* 2.18. Produce that has been left at the harvest (e.g., *pe'ah*, gleanings, forgotten things), but not collected by the poor, may be claimed by the householder.
- 19 Cf. the parallel in *Sifre Deut.* 116 and later iterations in *y. Pe'ah* 8.9, 21b and *b. Ket.* 67b. For additional commentary and manuscript variants on *t. Pe'ah* 4.12, see Gardner 2009: 212.
- 20 Or “considerate” to the poor man; see Lieberman 1955–1988b: 1:58–59; Brooks 1983: 150; cf. Jastrow 1903: 1621. Cf. *T. Job* 11:1–10 and *Lev. Rab.* 34.5; on these, see Satlow 2010: 250ff.
- 21 Or, perhaps, “retract” the terms of the exchange. On retracting or revoking transactions, see *m. Ma'as. Š.* 1.6; *t. B. Meši'a* 1.17; Falk 1972–1978: 201.
- 22 Lieberman 1955–1988a: 1:187; Lieberman 1955–1988b: 1:59.
- 23 MS Erfurt reads *halva'ah*. Both *milveh* and *halva'ah* are loans of money or some other fungible good.
- 24 My translation is based on the Hebrew text of Lieberman 1955–1988b: 1:59.
- 25 On households and householders in rabbinic Judaism, see Neusner 1990: 50–72; Satlow 2001: 3–41; Sivertsev 2002, 2005; Lapin 2006: 55. On the importance of economic independence in later rabbinic texts, see *y. San.* 9.7, 30b; *b. Beṣ.* 32b; *b. B. Bat.* 110a; *b. Pesah.* 112a.
- 26 My translation follows the earliest hand in MS Kauffman. For later emendations to *m. Pe'ah* 8.9 in MS Kaufmann and printed editions, see Bauer 1914: 71; Albeck

- 1952–1958: 1:66; Sacks 1972: 1:165–66; Brooks 1983: 151. On the multiple hands evident in MS Kaufmann, see Krupp 1987: 253. On the use of Jeremiah 17:7 in this pericope, see Samely 2002: 7–9. Notably, the language is similar to *t. Pe'ah* 4.12, suggesting that the passages should be read together.
- 27 While the concept appears in Tannaitic compilations, it is notable that the term *middah ke-neged middah* makes its first appearance in Amoraic texts; see Rosen-Zvi 2006: 277–78. See also Schofer 2004.
 - 28 See the Tannaitic sources cited in Falk 1972–1978: 2:184–85.
 - 29 Albeck's entries for "Acquisition" and "Gift" in Skolnik and Berenbaum 2007: 1:360; 7:590.
 - 30 The Bavli (*b. B. Bat.* 138a) interprets: "If the donee protested from the outset, all agree that he did not acquire it. If he first kept silent and finally protested, all agree that he acquired it." The precise words and terms used for refusing a gift are discussed in *b. Git.* 32a: "If he takes the gift into his hand and then said "this gift is to be cancelled" or "I do not want it" – he has said nothing. But if he said "it is cancelled" or "it is no gift" – his words stand [i.e., the gift is successfully repudiated]." In *b. Git.* 40b the Bavli deals with a conflict between the donor and donee – the donor says that he made a gift while the donee denies it. The translations and interpretations of these passages are according to Yaron 1960: 135–36.
 - 31 On honor and benefaction, see Veyne 1992; in ancient Judaism, see S. Schwartz 2001; Gardner 2007; S. Schwartz 2010.
 - 32 These instructions apply to individual benefactors as well as charity supervisors – those appointed to oversee the collection and distribution of the *quppa* or charity fund; see *m. Pe'ah* 8:7; *t. Pe'ah* 4:8–15.
 - 33 The conversion of one type of transaction for another was common in Tannaitic compilations. See, for example, the conversion of debts, wages, and a loan (*milveh*) in *m. Šeb.* 10.1. The discourse on the second tithe allows individuals to convert barter into a gift (*m. Ma'as. Š.* 1.1). The notion that charity is a loan that would be paid back is also seen in Philo (*Virt.* 83); as noted in Satlow 2010: 266.
 - 34 For the juxtaposition of the two kinds of loans, see *m. Abod. Zar.* 1.1. An analogous distinction is made in Roman law between a loan for use and a loan for consumption; see Lapin 1995: 186 n. 45. Related to this issue is the rabbinic *perozbol*, a legal instrument annulling the sabbatical release of debts; see *m. Šeb.* 10.3.
 - 35 *m. B. Meši'a* 5:1–11; see Lapin 1995: 190. The prohibition against charging interest to a fellow Jew is likewise attested in *Sifre Deut.* 262. Note that the rabbis prohibit charging interest to fellow Jews, but allow it to be charged to Gentiles, which follows the legislation in Deuteronomy 23:20–21. See *m. B. Meši'a* 5.6, as discussed in Lapin 1995: 190 n. 50.
 - 36 Lapin 1995: 198. Likewise, the Hebrew Bible's requirement not to expect interest implicitly acknowledges the right of a creditor to receive a pledge against his loan; cf. Exodus 22:25–27 and Deuteronomy 24: 10–13.
 - 37 See *m. Ma'as. Š.* 1.1 and Gulak 1939: 62–81. *m. Šebu.* 6.7, for example, discusses a pledge that was subsequently lost. *m. B. Meši'a* 6.7 discusses a loan (*milveh*) secured by a pledge (*mashkon*) to a borrower who is poor.
 - 38 *m. B. Meši'a* 9.13; *t. B. Meši'a* 10.9; *Sifre Deut.* 279. The rabbinic approach is based on Exodus 22:25–27; Deuteronomy 24:10–13, 17. See Chilton 1992: 2:114; Lapin 1995: 199–200.

- 39 Another option, which the rabbis do not explore, is to reciprocate with a token of gratitude – though this too could leave the poor in an inferior position; see Vandeveld 2000: 19; Komter 2005: 56–75.

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Further Reading

On poverty and charity in rabbinic Judaism and Roman Palestine, see Hamel 1990; Satlow 2005; Novick 2008; Gardner 2009; Gray 2009; Satlow 2010; Novick 2012. On reciprocity in ancient Judaism, see S. Schwartz 2010. On loans, see Lapin 1995, and on gifts, Yaron 1960.

Barter Deal or Friend-Making Gift? A Reconsideration of the Conditional Vow in the Hebrew Bible¹

ANNE KATRINE GUDME

A man's gift clears the way for him and brings him before the great.

Proverbs 18:16

The publication in 1923–1924 of the French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss's famous work *Essai sur le don/The Gift* marks the beginning of modern scholarship's interest in the gift and gift-giving. *The Gift* remains, as can be seen from several of the contributions in this volume, the starting point for most studies of gift-giving, and as Mark Osteen notes, "*The Gift* bears within it the seeds of virtually every important study of gift-giving that has succeeded it" (Osteen 2002: 3).

This article pursues one of Mauss's most influential insights, namely, the gift's capacity to create strong and lasting social bonds and relationships. In a reaction against Bronislaw Malinowski's concept of "pure gifts," which were given without any expectation of a return, Mauss described gifts as neither freely given nor disinterested: "They already represent for the most part total counterservices, not only made with a view to paying for services or things, but also to maintaining a profitable alliance, one that cannot be rejected" (Mauss 1990: 94). In this respect, the Maussian gift is first and foremost a friend-making gift. Because gift-exchange comes with a threefold social duty to give, to receive, and to reciprocate, it binds people together in durable ties of mutual exchange (Mauss 1990: 16–17, 42).

In what follows, this understanding of the gift as a social facilitator will be applied to the gifts given to deities in the Hebrew Bible and in particular to the biblical conditional vow.

The conditional vow in the Hebrew Bible is described by the root *n-d-r*. The noun *neder* means “a vow” and the verb *nādar* means “to vow/make a vow.” The root occurs ninety-one times in the Hebrew Bible, sixty times as a noun and thirty-one times as a verb. Seventeen times the noun *neder* is the object of the verb *nādar*: “to vow a vow.”² Tony W. Cartledge has argued convincingly, on the basis of biblical examples and comparative material, that the vow in the Hebrew Bible is to be understood as a conditional promise addressed to a deity, to be fulfilled only when and if the deity answers the petitioner’s request. The mechanism of the conditional vow is simple: “Dear God, if you grant me good health and a bountiful harvest, then I will give you an offering.” The petitioner’s prayer is strengthened by the promise of a gift or service (de Vaux 1962: 465; Cartledge 1989: 415–22, 1992: 12, 16–18).³

In the Hebrew Bible, there are six narrative examples of conditional vows made to Yahweh; the first is Jacob’s vow (Genesis 28:20–22), where Jacob promises to raise a pillar, to build a sanctuary, and to pay tithes if Yahweh will take care of him and ensure that he returns safely to the house of his father. In Numbers 21:2, the people of Israel promise to offer up the cities of the Canaanites as *herem* to Yahweh in return for victory, and in Judges 11:30 Jephthah promises to sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his house, which tragically turns out to be his only daughter, in return for defeating the Ammonites. In 1 Samuel 1:11, the prophet Samuel’s mother, Hannah, prays for a son and promises to dedicate him to Yahweh for all of his life, and in 2 Samuel 15:7–8 Absalom refers to a vow he made as an exile in Aram to sacrifice to Yahweh in Hebron if he would let him return to Jerusalem (Cartledge 1992: 162–99; Berlinerblau 1996: 49–57; Gudme 2009). The final example is the vow of the sailors in Jonah 1:16, which is going to be the point of departure for the present discussion. In the first chapter of the book of Jonah, the reluctant prophet tries to escape Yahweh and sails to Tarshish on a ship manned by “heathen” sailors.⁴ When out at sea the ship is caught in a mighty storm sent by Yahweh. The sailors, although hesitant at first, agree to throw Jonah overboard in order to appease the angry deity, and immediately the storm dies down. As a response to this arcane experience we are told that “the men feared Yahweh greatly, they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows (*vayidru nedārim*)” (1:16).

The vow of the sailors has caused biblical scholars some puzzlement, mainly because of the sequence of events in the narrative. The storm abates in verse 15b, and thus the sailors find themselves out of danger. They are, however, moved by “a great fear” of Yahweh, and first they offer a sacrifice and then they make vows. The difficulties arise mainly from two circumstances: the sacrifice and the vows are made *after* the danger has subsided, and the sacrifice is offered *before* the vows are made.

Several commentators have noted that sacrifices frequently function as the object of vows in the Hebrew Bible. In Leviticus 7:16 we have the prescriptions for the votive offering (*neder*), which is a variety of the offering of well-being; and in Leviticus 22:18 the burnt offering is mentioned as payment for a vow. The same is the case in Psalm 66:13, where the Psalmist says, “I will come into your house with

burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows" (Levine 1974: 43; Cartledge 1992: 13; Kaiser 1998: 247). Therefore one would expect the vow to precede the sacrifice in Jonah 1:16, so that the sailors first vow to offer sacrifices, whereupon they fulfill their vows (Tita 2001: 127).

It has been argued that the vows of the sailors may serve a propitiatory function and that they are intended to appease the deity and inspire him to grant the sailors a safe journey home (Davies 1962: 793; Thompson 1963: 225; Kaiser 1998: 247). Against this line of interpretation, Jacques Berlinerblau argues as follows:

A vow is essentially a bargain with the god(s), initiated by a supplicant who has a concrete need and thus makes a request. Therefore, the making of a vow (that is, asking the deity for a favour) would not appear as a particularly efficacious means of appeasing an angry deity. (Berlinerblau 1996: 70)

Berlinerblau suggests that instead of *making* vows the sailors are in fact *paying* vows, which they made previously during the storm when they feared for their lives (Berlinerblau 1996: 57, 69–70). Although this translation would solve the problem with the sequence, it seems inadvisable to adopt an otherwise unattested translation of *nādar* as "paying" or "fulfilling" vows.⁵

In order to overcome these perceived difficulties in the text, I suggest, first, that we widen our view of votive practice so that it includes gifts to the gods in general and not only gifts to the gods made in consequence of a vow (cf. Rouse 1902: 2; Pinch 1993: xxv; Osborne 2004), and second, that we define our understanding of gifts to the gods.

It is frequently pointed out that vows and prayers go together (de Vaux 1962: 465; van Baal 1976: 161–78; Cartledge 1989: 415; 1992: 12, 25). Very often prayers for help in a time of need are combined with a promise to bring a gift to the deity when the crisis has subsided. The crisis may be any conceivable unwanted state of affairs, such as illness, barrenness, economic misfortune, or being on board a ship in rough weather; and it may be a merely anticipated crisis that motivates humans to utter prayers before going to war, embarking on a sea journey, at the beginning of the harvesting season or of a pregnancy (Rouse 1902: 187–239). But it need not always be a negative occurrence or anxiety for the future that gives occasion for the gift. Some votive offerings are given to accentuate transitions in life. Thus craftsmen donate their tools at the end of their careers or to give thanks for a particularly successful piece of work, and votive gifts are dedicated to the deity at births, marriages, and when coming of age (Rouse 1902: 70–75, 240–58). Sometimes a stroke of good luck, such as an unexpected recovery from illness or a particularly prosperous year, is the reason for the votive offering.

William Henry Denham Rouse states that the three main reasons for votive practice are propitiation, intercession, and thanksgiving. Geraldine Pinch adjusts this statement by pointing out that the borderline between propitiation, at least propitiation as a preventive measure, and adoration is fine-drawn (Rouse 1902: 350–52; Pinch 1993: 352). When are we dealing with a votive offering that is

meant to prevent an outburst of divine anger and when are we dealing with one meant to maintain the good relationship between god and man? It really comes down to the same thing. Frequently a votive inscription not only contains a thanksgiving for the answering of a prayer or for good fortune, but also the expression of a hope that the deity will continue his or her beneficent activities. Thus, a cyclic process is established linking the acts of prayer, answering the prayer, giving thanks, and stating a new prayer (Drew-Bear, Thomas, and Yıldızıuran 1999: 38). Folkert van Straten points out this votive epigram by Callimachus as a good example of votive practice as continuous interaction between man and god:

Come again, Eilethya, answering the call of Lykainis, thus alleviating the birth pangs and producing a fortunate delivery. Just as you have now received this, mistress, as thanks for a daughter, so will your fragrant temple receive something else in thanks for a son. (van Straten 1981: 73)

While giving thanks for the recent birth of a daughter the epigram points to a prayer of safe delivery, perhaps accompanied by a vow, that has been made in the past and promises further gifts in the future in case of the birth of a son. Jan Bergman describes this relationship by underlining the temporal dimension of votive practice:

Theoretically, the strict votive offering constitutes an evident process consisting of at least three moments: the votum, bound to the future, is the point of departure; the decisive event, the activity of the god, marking the presence in a double sense; and the offering itself, promulgating the intimate connection between the three times and eternalizing the interaction between man and god. (Bergman 1987: 37)

If we follow this point of view, the differences between the vow-based votive offering, the thanksgiving offering, and the so-called free-will offering are mere nuances within the general scope of gifts to the gods. It is all a matter of where one enters the cycle. Is it at Bergman's point of departure, the vow/prayer, or is it when one has something to give thanks for, perhaps something that one had not requested, or is it as a simple "unprovoked" act of adoration or propitiation in the form of a free-will offering? Along the same lines, John Bodel writes:

However useful it may therefore be for us to classify dedications according to their immediate motivations (thanksgiving, absolution of vow, divine inspiration, and so on), we should more properly think of any particular offering or promise of an offering as part of a continuum rather than an isolated act. (Bodel 2009: 18)

In all instances, the common denominator is the aspect of the gift in the Maussian sense of the term. We are dealing with a gift dedicated to a deity for reasons of gratitude, petition, propitiation, or adoration and with the intention of creating a lasting relation.

The practice of giving gifts to a deity belongs to the mode of religion which Stanley K. Stowers has named “the religion of everyday social exchange.” In this mode of religion, religious practices and ritual actions are social actions directed toward counterintuitive beings, that is, gods, who are perceived as person-like agents and interested parties in a system of reciprocal exchange (Stowers 2011).⁶ By making conditional vows or bringing sacrifices or saying prayers, human beings attempt to control events and limit the uncertainties of everyday life by persuading the gods to act in their favor in the natural world or at least to ensure that they are on their side (Barrett and Lawson 2001: 183–201).⁷ In this context it is interesting to note that although votive practice is always initiated by the worshiper, it is always perceived as being initiated by the deity. The gods are credited with bringing crops, game, livestock, and offspring; and all these things are considered gifts from the gods (Stowers 2011).⁸ Therefore, the votive offering is always necessarily understood as a countergift because if the deity had not initially given something, the worshiper would simply have nothing to give back.

The difficulties with the vow – and with gifts to the gods in general – arise when scholars interpret the vow as a kind of trade. Biblical scholars habitually refer to the vow as a “bargain,” and Tony W. Cartledge even describes the motives behind the conditional vow as “even more blatantly commercial than the motives often attributed to the sacrificial system” (Cartledge 1992: 38; cf. Davies 1962: 792–93; Berlinerblau 1996: 70). Gift-giving, however, is not “blatantly commercial,” but characterized by reciprocity, which, unlike commercial exchange where things carry an exact exchange value, a price, is based on voluntary requital. This means that the “rules” of exchange are opaque: the time that passes between gift and countergift varies and there is no exact equivalence between exchanged commodities. Therefore, where commercial exchange merely creates a temporary relationship between objects, reciprocity creates a lasting relationship between people or between people and gods (Gregory 1982; Seaford 1998).

In his 1976 article “Offering, Sacrifice and Gift,” Jan van Baal criticized Edward Burnett Tylor’s understanding of sacrifice as gift. Van Baal pointed out that Tylor, by applying his *do-ut-des* theory, converted the gift into a bribe: “Tylor accuses the sacrificer of cheating. Of course he does; having founded his notions of gift and sacrifice on corruption, he has to persist to the very end” (van Baal 1976: 163). Van Baal further stated that Tylor’s and others’ misunderstanding of the gift reduced the supernatural receivers to “deities and ancestors dull enough to let themselves occasionally be cheated by the presentation of small titbits, or even of symbolic gifts such as that of a chicken for a real bull” (van Baal 1976: 162).

Van Baal rightly saw that the expectation of equivalence belongs to the sphere of trade and commodity and not to the sphere of gift; reciprocity does not aim at equality, but rather at alternating inequality (Godbout and Caillé 1998: 32–33, 129–30). Even between people of equal status the actors involved in a relationship of gift-exchange are alternately indebted to each other as donor and receiver respectively (Berking 1999: 8). Furthermore, the objects exchanged are not expected to be of equal value, but rather proportional to the financial capacity

of the giver. Therefore, the gift of a poor man is small, whereas the wealthy man's gift is lavish. In the case of so-called asymmetric giving (cf. Silber, in this volume) between parties of different social status there is no expectation of similarity between the gifts. Thus, in a gift relationship between human and deity precise equivalence is not only unnecessary and unexpected, it is simply impossible; what is received is necessarily and fundamentally different from what is given (Osborne 2004: 3). The gift is directed at the person of the receiver and the relationship created by gift-exchange is far more important than the objects exchanged and their relative value (van Baal 1976: 164, 167; Sahlins 2004: 190; Ullucci 2012).

Reciprocity demands that the countergift be, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, "deferred and different" (Bourdieu 1990: 105). "Different," because to return a gift with the same gift is to cancel the transaction and thus annul the gift; and "deferred," because the time that passes between gift and countergift is necessary to veil the fact that a form of exchange is actually taking place (Bourdieu 1990: 107). This point was stressed already by Mauss, who wrote that "time is needed in order to perform any counterservice" (Mauss 1990: 47–48). Bourdieu described how there is a difference between the phenomenological or subjective view of gift-giving and the objective view. The observer, who sees the act of gift-giving from "above," sees the gift as reversible, as an almost mechanical model of exchange, but to the agents involved in gift-giving the act is irreversible (Bourdieu 1977: 4–5).⁹

With regard to the gift given as fulfillment of a vow, the "terms" of the exchange are outlined explicitly in the wording of the vow, but the outcome of the act remains uncertain and the transaction is not mechanical or predictable. The votary binds her- or himself to fulfill the vow in case the prayer is heard, but the deity is free to answer the prayer or let it go unanswered as she or he sees fit. Therefore, the granting of the prayer is seen as a gift and the fulfillment of the vow as a countergift in accordance with the rules of reciprocity, but not in the sense of "payment" or a bargain (van Baal 1976: 172; Grottanelli 1989–1990: 49).

Gift-giving is not a fixed entity or closed system, but an open-ended social relationship. There is always an element of insecurity or "gambling" in gift-giving, because although there may be an expectation or norm of reciprocity, the nature of the exchange, like all social transactions, is continuously negotiated.¹⁰ When one gives a gift, one never knows if there will be a return or what it will be or when. The series of acts that constitute gift-exchange may come to a standstill at any time; one may offer a gift to a miser, who does not return the gift, or to a proud man, who refuses to accept the gift, turning courtesy to insult. One may experience that the gift is annulled, because it is instantly paid back, or the gift may be transformed into a loan by the same object being returned at a later time (Algazi 2003: 10, 17, 21–22). If the gift did not imply the risk of refusal, it would lose its social efficacy and capacity as a friend-making gift (Bourdieu 1990: 99).¹¹ The same holds true for gifts to the gods and perhaps even more so since the reaction of the deity to the gift is also a matter of interpretation. As Robin Osborne points out:

To give a gift to the gods is to enter into a relationship from which the return is uncertain. Both when and how a supernatural power will react to a gift are not only unknown at the time that the object is dedicated, but remain unknown. What might count as blessing is defined, and may be debated, by those who experience or observe the blessing; that blessings relate to past, or future, gifts is an “item of faith.” (Osborne 2004: 2)

Votive practice, like all kinds of gift-giving, entails the risk of being snubbed. Accounts of failed sacrifices are admittedly rare but not unknown, and the consequences for the sacrificers are dire; perhaps the best-known example from the Hebrew Bible is Cain’s rejected offering in Genesis 4, which leads to the first murder in the history of the world (Naiden 2006: 209). In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the high priest, are punished with death for presenting an unacceptable offering before Yahweh; and in Numbers 16 the sons of Korah are similarly punished for attempting to usurp the power of the priests in a ritual duel, and their offerings are rejected. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah also tries to seize the authority of the priests by offering incense to Yahweh, but the offering is prevented and Uzziah is immediately afflicted with skin disease, which bans him from the temple for life (cf. 1 Samuel 15; 1 Kings 13; Naiden 2006: 221). Another interesting example is Amos 5:22, where Yahweh threatens to break off his relations with the people of Israel by rejecting their sacrifices.

Generally, the assumption is that gifts, offerings, and sacrifices are pleasing to the deity (R. Parker 1998:108; Grottanelli 1989–1990: 49–50). In the Hebrew Bible, this is expressed for instance by describing sacrifices as “a pleasing odor (*reyaḥ niḥoah*) to Yahweh” (Milgrom 1991: 162–63). However, the deity is not obliged to receive the gifts or to reciprocate, and therefore every offering and sacrifice runs the risk of rejection. This circumstance is elaborately illustrated in an intriguing passage in Psalm 50, where Yahweh has gathered his divine council to pass judgment on his people. Yahweh refers to his “righteous ones” (*ḥasiday*) as the ones who have entered a covenant with him by sacrifices (*zebah*), and he promises the people of Israel that he will not rebuke them for their sacrifices (*zebah*) since their burnt offerings (*olot*) are continually brought before him. In spite of the obvious merit of sacrificing, Yahweh nevertheless threatens the people with rejection; he will not take their bulls or their goats, because all the beasts of the forests, the mountains, and the fields belong to him, and if he was hungry he would not tell them, “for the world and its fullness is mine” (Psalm 50:12). In this passage, Yahweh is emphasizing his independence; he may enjoy sacrifices, but he is not dependent on them (cf. R. Parker 1998: 122). Yahweh’s rejection of a gift may be a rare event, but its latency is important; if acceptance of the gift was guaranteed, its social capital would become devalued.

To sum up, giving gifts to the gods for reasons of gratitude, petition, propitiation, or adoration is not to be understood as a bargain, but as an invested social practice that aims at either establishing or maintaining a positive and durable relation between deity and worshipper.

The friend-making gift is widely attested in the Hebrew Bible.¹² One excellent example pointed out by John Bodel comes from 1 Kings 5–6, where King Solomon decides to build and dedicate a temple to Yahweh. Already in 2 Samuel 7, Solomon's father, David, wants to build "a house" for Yahweh, but the deity declines and promises instead to build "a house" (a dynasty) for David. In 1 Kings 5, the time has come for Solomon to perform the task proposed by his father; and when he begins to make preparations for the construction of the temple Yahweh's voice comes to him: "Concerning this house that you are building, if you will follow my ordinances, carry out my laws, and obey all my commandments by walking in them, then I will confirm my promise with you, which I made to your father David. I will dwell among the Israelites and I will not leave the people of Israel" (1 Kings 6:12–13).

Solomon makes a gift of the temple, to Yahweh, and Yahweh reciprocates by confirming that the relationship he previously held with David he will now hold with Solomon and with Solomon's kin and people (Bodel 2009: 19).

Gift-giving as initiating and maintaining a durable relation is also a recurring theme when it comes to vow making in the Hebrew Bible. Vows are made in times of crisis, as in the case of Hannah's barrenness in 1 Samuel 1:11; but vows are also made and paid habitually as in 1 Samuel 1:21, where Elkanah and his household travel to Shiloh to offer the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow (Cartledge 1992: 13).¹³

The relatively frequent occurrence of laws mentioning vows and the votive offering (Leviticus 7:16; 22:18–22; 27; Numbers 6:1–21; 15:8; 30; Deuteronomy 12:5; 23:18; 23:22–23) and the admonitions in Deuteronomy (23:21–22) and in Ecclesiastes (5:4) that it is better not to vow at all than it is to make a vow and break it indicate that vows were a common occurrence in everyday life (Berlinerblau 1991: 550–53).

In some cases the making of vows and the bringing of sacrifices are used to describe general worship. This is the case in Isaiah's oracle concerning Egypt's future worship of Yahweh, where the prophet predicts that the Egyptians will offer sacrifices and burnt offerings and make and fulfill vows (Isaiah 19:21; Cartledge 1992: 13). And in Jeremiah 44, offerings, libations, and vows are used to describe the exiles' worship of the Queen of Heaven, which of course, according to the prophet, ought to be directed to Yahweh instead (Davies 1962: 793). Therefore, we should view vow-making as a habitual practice and a common part of everyday worship, the aim of which is to bring about a beneficent relationship with the deity.

Another theme, which should probably not be pressed too far, is the relationship between vow-making and the initiation of a relation with a deity. When Jacob makes his vow in Genesis 28, he promises to make Yahweh his own god, if Yahweh will make sure that Jacob reaches his father's house safely (Cartledge 1992: 166–75; Gudme 2009: 72). Yahweh and Jacob have only "met" for the first time the very night before when Yahweh appears to Jacob in a dream in Genesis 28:12–15, and Jacob's vow on the following morning can be interpreted as a reply to the blessing promised by Yahweh during the night. Yahweh offers to continue the relationship that he held with Jacob's father and grandfather, Isaac and Abraham, and Jacob

responds by making a vow and thereby placing himself in Yahweh's care if the prayer accompanying the vow is heard.

In conclusion, let us return to the vow of the sailors in Jonah 1:16. The sailors experience first peril and then salvation, when the storm commanded by Yahweh appears and abruptly dies down. Subsequently they offer sacrifices, perhaps as a thanksgiving for being saved, as it has been suggested by some commentators, and then they make vows (Weiser 1974: 220; Wolff 1977: 98; Stuart 1987: 465). The vows are not a bribe or an attempt to strike a bargain with Yahweh. The sailors make vows because they want to make friends.¹⁴ Faced with this demonstration of Yahweh's powers, the sailors wish to enter into a positive relationship with the deity, and their means of doing so is to initiate a gift-exchange by making vows.

Notes

- 1 This paper was first presented at the conference "The Gift in Antiquity" at Brown University in May 2010 and then in an altered version at the SBL International Meeting/EABS conference in Tartu, Estonia, in July 2010. I am most grateful to the participants at both occasions for valuable feedback and comments. I am also immensely grateful to Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen and to Michael Satlow for their valuable comments and suggestions for the final draft of the article.
- 2 The verb *šālem* means "to pay or fulfill a vow." The noun *neder* occurs as the object for *šālem* eleven times. The root *n-d-r* occurs nineteen times in narrative texts, twenty-nine times in poetic texts, and forty-three times in legal texts. In nine of the occurrences in the legal texts and once in the narrative texts (1 Samuel 1:21), judging from the context, the noun *ndr* should probably be translated as a "votive offering" or "vow offering" rather than just vow. See also Kaiser 1998.
- 3 Against Adrian Schenker, who assumes the existence of unconditional vows and who categorizes vows in the Hebrew Bible as "prayer-vows" (*Bittgelübde*), which are conditional, and "thanksgiving-vows" (*Dankgelübde*) and "confessional vows" (*Bekennnisgelübde*), which are unconditional; see Schenker 1989: 87–91. Cartledge has contributed substantially to the study of conditional vows by drawing up a distinct terminology that distinguishes between vows, oaths, curses, and promises, and by arguing against a differentiation between so called "positive" and "negative" vows (vows of abstention); see Cartledge 1992: 11–72.
- 4 In verse 8, the sailors question Jonah: "Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" This indicates that the sailors are not "Hebrews" like Jonah; see verse 9. Cf. Brody 1998: 82.
- 5 Cf. Schenker 1989: 87. Berlinerblau refers to Levine for support for his claim that the verb *nādar* can also refer to the fulfillment or payment of vows; see Berlinerblau 1996: 69. What Levine says, however, is concerning the noun, *neder*, and that it can refer both to the vow when it is pronounced and to the "fulfillment or payment of the votive" (Levine 1974: 42). That is, not the act of paying, which would be described by the verb. In all the examples mentioned by Levine, Leviticus 7:2(?), 16; 22:21–23; Numbers 15:3, 8; Judges 11:39; 1 Samuel 1:21, the root *n-d-r* appears as a noun and is to be translated either as vow(s) or votive offering.

- 6 Cf. Lawson and McCauley's definition of ritual acts as ordinary actions that manipulate entities (and situations) in a world entertained within a conceptual scheme that includes culturally postulated superhuman agents (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 5 ff.). See also Cartledge 1992: 30, albeit without references to cognitive theories.
- 7 See Walter Burkert's description of votive practice: "The votive offering, the gift made to the god in consequence of a vow ... plays an essential part in defining the relation between men and gods as established in the exchange of gifts. In distress and danger man seeks to find deliverance through a voluntary act of renunciation, one determined and circumscribed by himself. He seeks to master the uncertainties of the future by means of a self-imposed "if-then" (Burkert 1985: 68–69).
- 8 Cf. Godelier 1999: 185–86. I disagree with Godelier's division between "great powers" and "minor powers," but I think he is right in his description of the gods as the first givers. Godelier stresses the inadequacy of the countergift, but see the discussion on asymmetrical gift-giving below.
- 9 Bourdieu directed his critique at Lévi-Strauss's idea of a "cycle of reciprocity." See Bourdieu 1990: 98: "The analyst reduces the agents to the status of automata or inert bodies moved by obscure mechanisms towards ends of which they are unaware. 'Cycles of reciprocity,' mechanical interlocking of obligatory practices, exist only for the absolute gaze of the omniscient, omnipresent spectator, who, thanks to his knowledge of the social mechanics, is able to be present at the different stages of the 'cycle.'"
- 10 There are some very intriguing similarities between game theory and gift-giving; see Gintis 2009: 162.
- 11 Several of these observations about the social value and efficacy of gift-giving are presented in Gary Stansell's very helpful "cross-cultural model of gift exchange in ancient societies"; see Stansell 1999: 69–70.
- 12 See Stansell 1999 for several examples of gift-exchange in the Hebrew Bible.
- 13 Simon B. Parker regards the vow only as a crisis occurrence and divides biblical and Ugaritic vows into three categories: (1) safe journey, (2) military victory, and (3) creating a family (S.B. Parker 1979: 699). Along the same lines, Cartledge writes that people did not make vows to "request minor favours or to avoid effort." Vows were used only when divine intervention was considered "essential" (Cartledge 1992: 27). Berlinerblau calls this view the "distress-hypothesis" and argues against it; see Berlinerblau 1991: 548.
- 14 Hans Walter Wolff reaches a similar conclusion, when he writes that the vows of the sailors are a sign of a "relationship of trust" (*vertrauensvoll Verbindung*); see Wolff 1977: 98. Unfortunately he does not state his reasons for reaching this conclusion. Hubert Tita interprets the vows as "confessions" (*Bekenntnisse*) to Yahweh (Tita 2001: 138–39, 203), but he insists that these vows are unconditional and denies any aspect of gift in the vow; see also 226–29.

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Further Reading

There are two very helpful edited volumes that deal with gifts to the gods in ancient religions. One is Linders and Nordquist 1987, and the other is Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford 1998. Furthermore, an entire issue of the journal *World Archaeology* (36 [2004]) deals with *The Object of Dedication*.

Satlow 2005 is a very good introduction to votive practice and reciprocity in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism; and Stansell 1999 is a helpful survey of “inter-human” gift-giving in the Hebrew Bible.

The topic of conditional vows in the Hebrew Bible has been excellently treated in two monographs, published in the early- and mid-nineties: Cartledge 1992; Berlinerblau 1996. See also Gudme 2009 for a brief introduction to the subject.

Neither Mauss, nor Veyne: Peter Brown's Interpretative Path to the Gift¹

ILANA F. SILBER

In Pursuit of the Holy, A Pursuit of the Gift

This chapter examines Peter Brown's contribution to research on the gift – or better phrased, given the intense debate around that very notion, the *problématique* of the gift. It is written from the viewpoint of a sociologist with no claim to expertise in the study of late antiquity, but much conviction in the need for continuous dialogue and mutual fructification between history and sociology in general and in the field of gift analysis in particular. More precisely, I submit, it is the need to advance a comparative and historical perspective still embryonic in that field that justifies drawing attention to Brown's writings. From that angle indeed, Brown is important as not only the famed, giant historian of late antiquity, but also as a historian uncommonly ready to refer to examples taken from other historical periods and cultural settings,² as well as one who has often and explicitly acknowledged the impact of the social sciences and anthropology in particular.³

Too often, however, sociologists expect no more from historians than to fill them in with “facts,” and carry out the painstaking study of primary sources, which they themselves do not have the skills or patience to collect and analyze. Yet in Brown's case, it is precisely his broad interdisciplinary awareness, and a style of writing brilliantly weaving an uncanny attention to hard and concrete “facts” with sweeping interpretations of macrocultural processes and long-term trends, that make one suspect that his writings may be of benefit to social scientists in general and comparative historical sociologists in particular.

To the extent that interest in Brown's work was indeed already voiced by sociologists (e.g., Douglas 1982; Beckford 1983; Silber 1995; Sharot 2001; Hecht 2006), it was usually drawn to what Peter Brown perhaps still remains best known for, namely, his exploration of the manifold manifestations of the "holy" in the context of late antiquity. In such regard, it is of course his classic studies of such topics as the rise and function of the holy man, the cult of the saints, and their broader implications for the understanding of changing relations between religion and society that occupy a key position. Some sociologists might have also encountered his work on the body and sexuality through the mark they left in Michel Foucault's writings in particular.

In contrast, it is Brown's contribution to the comparative study of giving that I shall try here to distill from his writings, with a focus on what may be called religious or pious giving, that is, patterns of giving framed and underpinned by the evolving structures of Christianity – and mainly post-Constantine Christianity – in the framework of the Roman Empire.⁴ If clearly less central to his work as a whole, it is a topic that keeps emerging in more or less scattered fashion across the corpus of his writings. But it also received distinct treatment in two texts in particular: his 2002 volume, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (based on his Menahem Stern Lectures delivered in Jerusalem in 2000), and a more recent article entitled "Remembering the Poor and the Aesthetic of Society," which appeared as part of a special, comparative issue on poverty and charity in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* in 2005.

Holiness and the gift, however, are far from being hermetically separated topics in Brown's writings. In fact, themes of giving and gift-exchange also emerge in Brown's writings on holy men, who are occasionally depicted as both giving and receiving gifts (e.g., Brown 1993: 173; 1997: 62–64).⁵ And holiness itself, more generally, is shot through with gift-related themes, be it when pictured as a potent source or result of giving, as generating a flow of divine favors in help to others, or itself a gift received from God, as a property unusually salient in outstanding individuals, objects (relics), sites, and institutions (themselves in turn attracting gifts), or potentially applicable to all members of the Christian community endowed by baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit. At a most fundamental level, it could even be argued that these two themes, holiness and the gift, are never very far apart and even often interpenetrate each other, as part and parcel of Brown's ongoing preoccupation with the relation between religion and society in general and with the manifold interaction between religious elites and their social context in particular.⁶

But it is crucial to stress that Brown himself would never present it this way. One main reason for that, simply enough, is that while he has no qualms using such abstract concepts as "religion," "the holy," or "society," he never uses or discusses the term "gift" as an abstract, generic category. (Symptomatically perhaps, the term hardly ever appears in the index of his books.) In truth, it is not easy to ascertain the meaning or importance of this "absence" of the very notion of the gift as such in Brown's writings. One might simply argue that the idea is so much taken for granted that it may not require explicit articulation. Yet, precisely given

Brown's readiness to acknowledge personal encounters and conceptual influences from the social sciences that have shaped his work, it would be a mistake to ignore the fact that he never engages the *problématique* of the gift nor ever refers to any of the landmark studies in that field, be these past classics such as Marcel Mauss's famed *Essai sur le don* or more recent works across the humanities and social sciences.⁷

The idea here is certainly not to underscore this "conspicuous" silence on Brown's part as a matter of criticism but rather to take it as an intellectual puzzle and a challenge. The challenge entailed is all the more daunting since I shall try to show that willy-nilly, and in an eclectic and impressionistic rather than systematic fashion, Brown did develop a specific approach to the analysis of religious giving in particular, one that is also worth tapping into in exploring the contours of gift-processes in late antiquity, as well as worth trying to bring into dialogue with the very stream of reflection on the gift which he seems (whether consciously or not) to have been keeping at bay.

Most striking for present purposes is the complicated case of Brown's relation to Paul Veyne, so close to his own area of historical research and with whom he had an active intellectual and professional interaction.⁸ Of central interest here, of course, is Veyne's monumental study of "euergetic" giving in the classical Greek cities and the Roman empire, *Le pain et le cirque* (Veyne 1976). On the one hand, Brown repeatedly cites and builds on that work, and as will be further explained below, even explicitly endorses Veyne's main line of argument on important issues in the historiography of giving, such as the nature of euergetism and the way in which it differed from charitable giving in general and from Christian patterns of charity in particular. On the other hand, he never actually refers to the extensive theoretical sections in that volume (alas, excised from its delayed translation into English in 1990), wherein Veyne develops an elaborate typological and conceptual approach to euergetism, precisely as a subtype of the gift.⁹ And yet it is precisely on the background of his many convergences with Veyne, while also positioning both thinkers in relation to Mauss as well as more recent currents in the field of gift analysis, that I find it useful here to clarify the distinctive contribution of Brown's own interpretative approach.¹⁰

Neither Mauss nor Veyne?: Asymmetric Giving in Historical Perspective

For a start, it needs be recalled that Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (Mauss 1923–1924) develops the idea of the gift as a foundational, generic phenomenon, manifesting an impressive continuity and essentially similar nature across the most diverse historical periods and cultures. If Mauss scans diverse historical periods and civilizations, it is thus mainly as a way of uncovering the recurrent, similar core features and principles of operation of the gift rather than of mapping out any eventual discontinuities and differences.¹¹

In contrast, as will be detailed below, Veyne and Brown both adopt a deeply contextualizing, historicizing as well as diversifying perspective, that is, a perspective that also seeks to distinguish between the dynamics and implications of different modes of giving. As such, their contribution is also deeply congenial to the recent spurt of research now grappling for new ways to conceptualize the huge diversity and historical variability of gift-processes within and across historical and cultural settings.¹² In addition, Veyne and Brown both join forces with a growing group of scholars who have asked to better draw into focus asymmetric, nonreciprocal, or unilateral forms of giving – be these religious or not – which Mauss's paradigmatic emphasis upon gift-exchange and its triple set of obligations (to give, to accept, to return) had tended to leave beyond the scope of his analysis (e.g., Parry 1986; Silber 1995, 2000; Godelier 1996; Laidlaw 2000; Tarot 2000; Hénaff 2002, 2009).

Even more specifically and distinctively, both scholars will also be shown to converge in underscoring the capacity of precisely such asymmetric, or unilateral, forms of giving to provide a vehicle for the expression and negotiation of personal and collective identities in the public sphere – a public sphere which gift-processes are thus both shaping and shaped by. To that extent, they both explore what may be seen as historical examples of not only asymmetric but also public giving. Moreover, both highlight not only the solidary implications of such gift-processes, but also their competitive, agonistic dynamics at the level of social elites promoting competing models of leadership and bases of legitimacy. In fact, this even reveals a classic Weberian strain of thought, which may not be surprising in the case of Veyne, as he explicitly positions himself in the lineage of Weber in other respects, but has seldom been noticed in Brown's work, and indeed was never presented as such by himself.

Last, but not least, both scholars display a no-less-Weberian multidimensional attention to a wide range of historical factors (i.e., economic, social, institutional, political, and so on), helping to understand configurations of the gift and their transformations, while also deploying, to the point of perhaps favoring, a richly cultural, even macrocultural mode of interpretation.

These very broad convergences between Veyne and Brown are significant in themselves and relevant to the current advance of gift research and theory, in the context of which they need to be better understood and incorporated than they have been until now. But it is also important to discern in what precise ways Brown not only converges with but also differs from Veyne, as I shall try now to further specify.

From “Love of the City” to “Love of the Poor”: Untidy Mutations and Competitive Tension

Substantively, there is no doubt much, even impressive, agreement and convergence between these two giant scholars of antiquity in their historiographic assessment of euergetic and Christian giving and the relation between them. Both agree that patterns of Christian giving as they started to take shape from the third century on in the context of the Roman Empire stood in contrast with euergetism, the term

used to refer to a mode of giving that flourished in the classical Greco-Roman world, whereby notables or officials (including the Roman emperor himself) contributed from their private wealth to sponsor a whole range of public institutions and collective endeavors.¹³ Not only is euergetic giving presented as a practice of the elites but also a practice basically “secular” in orientation, as well as one geared to the good of the city as a whole and its citizens. In contrast, Christian charitable giving is a practice open to and even incumbent on all members of the church, independent of wealth and status.¹⁴ It also singles out the “poor” as a category of recipients that cuts across city and country alike and which was given no importance as such in the conceptual world of classical euergetic donors.¹⁵

Far from seeing it as a marginal trend, both scholars clearly give far-reaching importance to this major transformation in patterns of public giving, which Brown often sums up as one from “love of the city” to “love of the poor”:

It is agreed that one of the most decisive – or at least one of the most symbolically charged – shifts between the classical and the late antique worlds involved an imaginative revolution that affected the definition of society. The imperial elites and the elites of the cities came to see themselves as obliged to establish relations, through gifts of money and the provision of services, no longer to a clearly defined and overwhelmingly *urban* nucleus of their fellow citizens, but to the less exclusive category of the poor, in town and country alike. The *philopatris* – the lover of the hometown – of the classical age became the *philoptochos*, the *amator pauperum* – the lover of the poor – of Late Antiquity and of the early Middle Ages. (Brown 2000: 338)

By and large, Brown’s interpretation of that change is highly compatible with Veyne’s attention (perhaps under the influence of Foucault) to the impact of systems or frames of thought (Veyne 1976: 64–68), although it is one that gives much weight to what he rather addresses as changing “self-images of the community,” “body-images of society,” “notions of the public community,” or imagined “models of society”:

For almost a millennium, first in Greece and then in Rome, a distinctive “style” of public giving had always been thought to communicate a distinctive self-image of the community that benefited from this giving. A great giver was expected to give to a specific group and to no other; and in the definition of this group, the poor as such had no place whatsoever. (Brown 2002: 3)

...In all ages, models of society exert a great, and frequently unconscious influence on those who hold them. In reconstructing them, the historian reconstructs nothing less than the invisible boundaries beyond which contemporaries were little inclined to think about their world. This accounts in the present instance for the profound lack of interest on the part of public benefactors of the classical age in a “care of the poor” that would have seemed quite natural to Jews and Christians of the late antique and medieval periods. Classical benefactors were not necessarily more hard-hearted. They simply looked out on society and saw, above all, cities and citizens, while Jews and Christians had come to see, rather, rich and poor. (Brown 2002: 9)

In sum, the rise of Christian charity as a form of public giving thus developed in tandem with, and at least in part as a result of, a new image or model of society that made it possible to constitute “the poor” as a worthy and distinct category of recipients of charitable giving. Brown also underscores that it opened a new public role for women as an important category of donors (Brown 1981: 46).¹⁶ Furthermore, it could only develop into a public virtue with the decline of the city as the basic unit of reference, in what Brown suggestively depicts, with a wealth of visual and spatial metaphors, as changing perceptions of “social horizons” and of the social landscape:

“Love of the poor,” therefore did not grow naturally out of the ideals of public beneficence that had dominated the minds and determined the actions of public benefactors in Greek and Roman times. It could only come to the fore as a meaningful public virtue when the ancient “civic” sense of the community was weakened ... Christian and Jewish charity threw open the horizons of society In the new model of society, which would dominate the social imagination of the Christian Middle Ages up to and beyond the Age of the Reformation, society was seen as a single, all-embracing whole that included city and countryside alike. (Brown 2002: 5–6)

Both scholars would also agree, however, that this deep shift and set of contrasts did not go without some amount of interpenetration and even historical continuity: pagan charitable institutions did exist in the past, new meanings were lent to ancient situations (such as that of a widespread and permanent threat of impoverishment), and wealthy Christian donors are sometimes found to strike euergetic themes or give for the good of the city in euergetic fashion – the so-called “Christianization of euergetism” – or simply to display a mix of religious and secular orientations (Veyne 1976: 55–56; Brown 2002: 77). Moreover, lingering notions of the civic *plebs* contributed to inflate the group of those perceived and perceiving themselves as entitled to charitable help from somewhere “above” (be it from wealthy individuals, the church, or the imperial state) much beyond the circles of the truly destitute. In short, the story is never one of neat distinctions and clear-cut developments but in many ways, to use a term Brown favors, one of “untidy mutations.”

Significantly here, this element of continuity and interpenetration between euergetic and charitable giving perhaps also helps explain a form of competitive tension and mutual self-comparison between them:

Acts of giving that could still be represented in terms of the traditional generosity of a *euergetēs*, of a public benefactor of his city, were now performed, in the Christian church, for the benefit of the “poor.” Such acts of generosity showed that a process of “Christianization of evergetism” was well under way in the post-Constantinian Church. Their resonance was enhanced by the echoes they evoked of the classical *belle époque*. It was satisfying to write about them in old-fashioned terms and especially if it was possible thereby to make invidious comparisons between such actions and the wasteful spending of traditional civic benefactors. (Brown 2002: 77)

Reaching thus beyond assessing the relation between euergetic and charitable giving simply in terms of continuity and change, or similarity and difference, Brown augurs a specific way of understanding the emergence of specific modes of giving as entailing, perhaps even being dependent on, a process of self-definition in contradistinction to other modes of giving – both past and contemporary. Significantly here, the very same process, and the need to approach it from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, will again draw his attention when he comes to analyze the emerging differentiation and relation between diverse modes of Christian giving.

Asymmetric Public Giving and the Symbolic Constitution of Elite Identities

Conceptually, and referring now to current trends in gift research and theory, both civic euergetism and Christian charity may be seen as pertaining to the realm of asymmetric ideologies of giving, entailing no expectation of direct return from the recipient, and even ideally lowering such expectations. This is the kind of break in reciprocity underscored by Jonathan Parry in a pathbreaking article on the idea of the “pure gift”: that is, giving shaped by other-worldly religious orientations and valorized as a practice in disinterestedness encouraging the capacity to transcend one’s attachment to worldly possessions, at the same time as it is also geared to an associated set of beliefs in intangible or soteriological rewards (Parry 1986).

As illustrated by “secular” euergetism no less than blood donations as “gifts to strangers” (Tittmus 1971) or modern forms of philanthropy (Silber 1998), the issue of nonreciprocal, asymmetric giving and the challenge it poses for Mauss’s classic emphasis on the “obligation to return” is far from limited to religiously informed ideals of giving. It is also seen as a characteristic feature, more generally, of what Marcel Hénaff has termed “gracious,” unilateral modes of giving (Hénaff 2002, 2009).¹⁷ Rather than characterizing whole, distinct categories of giving, moreover, reciprocity and its contrary might be better approached as variable dimensions on a continuum, partaking of a broader, flexible analytic matrix of variable dimensions (such as gradients of interestedness and disinterestedness, obligations and freedom, and so on), capable of accounting for diverse modes and expressions of gift relations (see note 11 and in particular Graeber 2001; Chaniel 2010).

This also means – as already forcefully intimated by Mauss – that a stress on asymmetry or disinterestedness at the ideal and ideological level need not imply an actual absence of mundane returns or interests on the donors’ side. In line with Mauss precisely (even if neither refers to his name), Veyne and Brown again agree in underscoring the complex mix of interestedness and disinterestedness that often drives donors in the context of such asymmetric patterns of elite giving:

As historians ... we need harbor no illusions as to the motives of so many of those who were praised as high-minded lovers of their cities. A *euergetés* might be no altruistic

philanthropist ... The emphasis on the personal generosity of the emperor Augustus and his successors toward the *plebs* of Rome, "his" very own city, was a statement that veiled, in acceptable classical form, their overpowering authority as emperors. (Brown 2002: 4)

This potent mix of interests and disinterestedness is thus also what enables the gift to operate as a vector for the symbolic constitution of personal and collective identities, and thereby penetrate as well as shape power dynamics and the public sphere. Indeed, it is one of the main, and more significant, conceptual convergences between Veyne and Brown that they both display a sustained concern with the part played by giving in the symbolic constitution of elite status and authority in the public sphere. Undoubtedly, there is a major difference in the kind of elite status at stake: while Veyne is concerned with the euergetic patterns of giving of relatively established types of social elites and related patterns of leadership and authority, Brown examines rather the rise of new, upcoming social elites and relates the advent of Christian organized charity to the rise of bishops in particular as leaders of the church. Yet analytically, there is much similarity in their mode of interpretation, reaching in both cases for a deeply symbolic and relational understanding of these two major forms of giving – a mode of symbolic interpretation again very much in line with Mauss's approach to the gift as a symbolic practice, capable of making and unmaking social relations at the same time as it is ultimately irreducible to any form of mere, ordinary exchange.

In the case of Veyne, the argument is rooted in a complex analysis of euergetism as ultimately irreducible to anything else and, in particular, to any utilitarian interest, social function, exchange, redistribution, or sociopolitical manipulation, not because it may not entail these various interests or functions (in fact it often does) but because it is also "something else" that cannot and should not be reduced to them. To the extent that Veyne does express in positive terms in what exactly consists this irreducible feature of euergetism, he clearly opts for the theme of a free, spontaneous impulse, that is, the donor's need to express and please himself, yet not purely "selfish" or narcissistic as it coincides with the expectations and pleasure of a diffuse audience of potential beneficiaries at seeing the gift actually enacted. In the last and perhaps best-known section of his book – dealing with Roman-imperial rather than Greek-civic patterns of euergetism – Veyne amplifies that conception to the point of anchoring euergetism in the affectively loaded symbolism and dynamics of the interface between rulers and ruled, governing and governed, that is, in the complex relational symbolism of hierarchy, command, and power.

It is perhaps at this point that Brown's contribution, however oblivious to any such conceptual discussion of the ultimate nature of giving, turns most distinctive and decisive, as it points to far-reaching relations between the rise of Christian charity and broader political structures or even political culture at large. The recognition at stake is not only that given by the donor to the recipient or even mutually "exchanged" between them; but it is also the recognition achieved by

donors for themselves in the eyes of other donors of the same rank, and no less important, the recognition of donors' very capacity and *legitimacy to give* by both an imagined collective at large and a no-less-imagined, but concretely threatening, source of power, that of the political center, of the imperial officials, and the emperor himself.

Brown thus analyzes, among other things, how taking care of the poor helped the rise of the bishops as ecclesiastical rulers, by making them seem "useful" to a specific constituency as well as to society at large, thus helping justify the privileges and exemptions they were granted by the empire. He also situates the bishops' ever fragile status and need for legitimacy in the context of a widespread and intensified political culture of claims and expectations "from above," where bishops were seen as voicing the needs of the needy (in a very large sense, including all those at various stages of material insecurity) vis-à-vis a political center, which was itself struggling to maintain a proper balance of distance and proximity in relation to various groups. Partaking of that complex macropolitical setting, Brown also highlights the impact of "master images" of the sharp gap and vertical relation between poor and powerful, and the various ways that developed to bridge over and mediate that gap (Brown 2002: 80).

While Brown and Veyne thus certainly differ in the specifics of their respective analyses, it is striking that for both scholars, euergetism and Christian charity entail symbolic dynamics of public recognition deemed rather characteristic, in Hénaff's suggestive typology at least, of reciprocal, "ceremonial" forms of giving (Hénaff 2002, 2009). And it is precisely this dimension of public recognition that underpins the capacity of euergetic and charitable, unilateral elite giving to operate – in a Foucauldian vein probably acceptable to both scholars – as significant vectors of "governmentality" (Dean 1999: 76–82).

An Expanding Repertoire of Religious Giving

One area of Brown's analysis that deserves separate emphasis, I believe, is his attention to the increasing mix of intertwining and tension between two major axes of Christian giving, between charitable giving to the poor and needy (however diversely defined and expandable these notions could be) and giving for the support of religious elites and institutions, or as I have termed it elsewhere, "sacerdotal giving" (Silber 2002):

What early Christians took for granted as a part of an inherited conglomerate of notions shared with Judaism was that they were responsible for the care of the poor of their own community. By the third century C.E., however, the Christian churches had developed a further category of persons who claimed support. The bishops and their clergy expected to be supported, either fully (in the case of the bishop) or in part (in the case of priests, deacons and other servants of the church) by their fellow believers. (Brown 2002: 20)

In fact, much of Brown's analysis is devoted to showing how these two modes of Christian giving became closely intertwined via the new figure and growing role of the bishop and the mediating role of ecclesiastical structures. In that process, church leaders became both recipients and redistributors, facilitators of the circulation of wealth. This did not go without tensions and dilemmas, which could lead to "a potentially acute conflict between support of the 'normal poor' and support of the 'ministering poor,' already felt *in nuce* at a very early stage" (Brown 2002: 23).

Facilitating both modes of giving, moreover, is a third mode of giving, fleetingly addressed by Brown in various places (and only briefly noted by Veyne as well), namely, the fraternal help extended in solidarity to endangered or impoverished members of the church; providing a sort of primal background for the two other modes, it was especially salient in the early fragile and threatened Christian communities and is potentially bestowed on all members of a single church (Brown 2002: 16ff.; Veyne 1976: 38). As such, it permits the circulation of wealth among brethren and has redistributive implications of a kind that, according to Veyne at least, could not apply to euergetism. Going back to Hénaff's distinction (see note 16), Christian almsgiving thus entails a combination of "gracious" and "solidary," or "solidarity-based" modalities of giving.

What we see thus emerging from Brown's argument, I submit, are the contours of a repertoire of coexisting and competing modes of religious giving, defining themselves via mutual as well as partial differentiation from previous modes of civic, euergetic giving.¹⁸ Institutionally, as Brown points out, the emergence of such a relatively distinct and diversified repertoire of giving, with its distinctive set of ideals, tensions, and dilemmas, also entailed the formation of distinctive organizations and institutions. In the context at hand, Brown thus identifies novel structures of organized charity – such as the *xenodochia* in particular – that emerged in the post-Constantinian church (Brown 2002: 32). And we know the growing mediating role of ecclesiastical institutions, and monasteries in particular, in the circulation of wealth and the related "economy of salvation" as it would later flourish full-blown in the context of medieval Catholicism (Silber 1995; Magnani 2003).

At the level of religious beliefs and ideologies, however, we need note that Brown's analysis remains relatively modest, and limited. We are only offered occasional clues as to how doctrinal and soteriological themes – such as the Incarnation and Christ's "poverty" (Brown 2002: 93, 110–11), or related themes of grace or sacrifice (altogether absent from his text, to my knowledge) – might spur the differentiation and uneasy coexistence between an expanding range of modes of giving. Neither is it clear how such theological themes might interact with "models of society" on the one hand, and institutional developments on the other, in shaping the precise contours and internal differentiation of repertoires of giving in late antiquity in general, and the specific importance of asymmetric forms of giving in particular. As we shall see, neither do theological or soteriological beliefs play any role in Brown's later, master image of "social aesthetics" as a sort of ultimate, embracing mode of cultural interpretation for changes affecting giving.

Social Aesthetics and the Gift

I wish to end here by drawing attention to what I see as a fascinating ambiguity in Brown's approach to gift-processes – fascinating because it is unacknowledged as such, as it emerges forcefully in what, to my knowledge, is his most recent statement on the topic – “Remembering the Poor and the Aesthetic of Society” (Brown 2005) – and the precise significance of “social aesthetics” in that regard. At first sight, Brown might seem to have opted for a downright utilitarian, nearly “cynical” interpretation of giving. Taking care of the poor, as we already saw above, added legitimacy to a bishop's status and helped justify various ecclesiastical privileges and tax exemptions. In addition, bishops and other church officials were interested in teaching charity because it also meant promoting their own material survival.¹⁹ In other words, Peter Brown addresses here what I see as the more instrumental aspects of “religious patronage” (Brook 1993), that is, those addressing the funding of religious activity, personnel, or institutions as a way of providing for the latter's need for material support (thus also partly converging with giving to the poor and other needy). This is distinct from the more expressive and spiritual aspects of “sacerdotal” giving, with which it may or may not combine: that is, giving as the expression of a distinctive form of spiritual relationship, the acknowledgment of certain religious ideals or practices, and the willingness to sponsor their individual or institutional representatives, whether materially “in need” or not, as a tribute to an ultimate “religious” entity or principle (Silber 2002: 300).

On the other hand, his recent essay “Remembering the Poor and the Aesthetics of Society” throws the argument into a very different direction. Significantly, however, the thrust of his interpretation is now neither merely instrumental nor precisely spiritual in the sense just mentioned. If “love of the poor” became a public virtue that penetrated and shaped the public sphere, Brown argues, it is not only a matter of compassion, or even of formal doctrine, religious ideals, or injunctions. Rather, it stems from a certain “aesthetics of society,” or sense of what is a good society, which would not allow the poor to be “forgotten.” This emphasis on “social aesthetics” appears to elaborate on Brown's master idea of “images of society,” which we have already encountered above, in a way now more deeply pervaded by a concern with issues of memory and social visibility.

The point, however, is that not only the poor but everyone who is not of obvious necessity to society at large, and more especially clerics and monks, and even ultimately God himself, runs the risk of being invisible, “forgotten.”²⁰ Love of the poor is thus the symptom of an “alliance of those who risk being forgotten” (2005: 9):

In earlier societies, men of prayer and men of the pen, persons committed to elevated, weightless words of no obvious social utility – were the tacit beneficiaries of the same “aesthetic of society” that protected the poor from being forgotten. The manner in which a society remembers its forgettable persons and characterizes the failure to do so is a sensitive indicator of its tolerance for a certain amount of apparently unnecessary,

even irrelevant, cultural and religious activity. What is at stake is more than generosity and compassion. It is the necessary heedlessness by which any complex society can find a place for the less conspicuous elements of its cultural differentiation and social health. (Brown 2005: 22)

In other words, religious giving in the context of the imaginary structures of late antiquity emerges as a tribute not to specific religious doctrines and ideals but rather, more generally framed, as a tribute to the elevated but useless and immaterial, and a symptom of a society's capacity to bestow recognition to what transcends utility and is beyond ordinary necessity.

In a sense, I submit, we are brought back full circle to Brown's lasting preoccupation with the holy or as he also addresses it at times, under the inspiration of Edward Shils, the centrally sacred and charismatic (Brown 1983: 9). While itself involving concrete human gestures and the transfer of material goods, giving is now said to point toward a sacred realm lying beyond the domain of merely material, utilitarian, ordinary considerations and limitations. And it is perhaps precisely the paradoxical mix of materiality and transcendence, symbolic concreteness and invisibility deeply associated with the gift, however itself "forgotten" by Brown, that may well explain its deep, evolving connection to changing manifestations of the holy.

Repertoires of Giving in Comparative Historical Perspective

Converging with Veyne but also reaching beyond him in some respects, the importance of Brown's analysis therefore, is that it demonstrates how religious giving was able to achieve public importance and undergo institutionalization while not only differentiating itself from previous, euergetic form of public giving, but also itself undergoing further, "internal" differentiation. The result is the description of a fledgling repertoire of religious giving, with intricate relations of interpenetration, competition, and mutual distinction between charity to the poor, sacerdotal donations to religious elites or institutions, and mutual help in solidarity with members of the same religious communities.

As splendidly confirmed in still very rare attempts to account for entire repertoires of giving in a defined historical setting (N.Z. Davis 2000; Ben-Amos 2008), such processes of emergence and interaction between various types of giving need be better taken into account by macrohistorical and sociological treatments that focus on the gift's interaction with market and state institutions in particular but do not attend to processes of transformation and diversification pertaining to the gift itself.

In line with what we found suggested by Brown, if ever so implicitly, we may only wish for future studies to further explore the rise and definition of specific modes of unilateral and public giving, be these religious or secular, via

contradistinction from other, and in particular personal and private, types of gift.²¹ As richly argued by Daniel Caner in this volume, precisely such processes appear to accompany the emergence of a distinctive category of “pure” religious giving (“blessings” in early Byzantium) in distinction from other modes of religious giving, and in implied contrast to “ordinary” or even corrupt forms of secular giving and gift-exchange. Far from expecting stable and hermetic distinctions, moreover, Caner’s analysis is also important in that it considers patterns of flow, possible directions of mutation or transformation between diverse modalities of giving, as a way of better establishing their precise synchronic interrelation within a specific historical context. A similar attention to flows and transformations emerges from Galit Hasan-Rokem’s exploration of the dynamic relation between themes of sacrifice to God and pious support of rabbis in late-antique rabbinical literature (Hasan-Rokem, this volume), further confirming the need to approach historical repertoires of giving as fluctuating configurations best understood, ideally, when combining a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

As these recent advances indicate, and would have been warmly supported by Peter Brown himself I believe, we also need to put public and religious giving in a broader comparative perspective. Taking the case of Islam, for example, it could be argued that via the institution of the *waqf*, in various ways in different historical periods and geographical areas, religious asymmetric giving came to play an important part in the very shaping of the public sphere.²² Strikingly, and in part as a result of the entailed dedication and immobilization of wealth “for eternity,” it also often entailed a form of civic giving aimed at promoting and even embellishing the city. Of no less interest, it could also entail varying combinations of private and public dimensions, themselves presumably inflected by what Brown would address as diverse models or self-images of society.

Further expanding the above rendering of repertoires of giving, moreover, we need note that both Islamic as well as Jewish religious giving, or “sacred charity,” could also include the sponsoring of religious learning. Revealing the impact of specific doctrinal and religious orientations – a factor that, as we saw above, remained relatively underplayed in Brown’s cultural analysis – such sponsoring of learning could in turn seriously “compete” with and even overshadow giving to the poor (Lev 2009). In contrast, the sponsoring of learning is a mode of religious giving that hardly came to expression in the gift repertoire of early Christianity.

More generally, the extent to which religious giving develops into civic giving, as well as itself gives rise to differentiated areas of religious giving while also distinguishing itself from the multiple gift-processes thriving in other (and especially more private) zones of social life, are all issues that remain to be explored and compared in both historical and contemporary civilizations. We can only wonder whether a similar emphasis on the part played by hierarchies of status and power, “models of society,” and conceptions of poverty, as well as by symbolic affinities with the invisible and the holy – such as are powerfully identified in Brown’s writings – will emerge confirmed again in the framework of such an expanded comparative

approach to the gift. Reaching back to Marcel Mauss and recalling his deep interest in religions as well as his strong historical and comparativist leanings – however all paradoxically understated in his *Essai sur le don* – we can safely presume he would have rejoiced at the prospect of such an enlarged comparative, historical, and macrocultural elaboration of his pathbreaking uncovering of the core significance of gift-processes.

Notes

- 1 A first version of this article was delivered at the international workshop on “The Gift in Antiquity,” Brown University, May 2–4, 2010. I wish to thank Michael Satlow for this daring intellectual initiative, and the participants in the workshop for encouraging and stimulating comments.
- 2 See, for one example among many, his references to the work of David Cannadine on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, or of Jean-Pierre Gutton on early modern France when examining the subjective perceptions of class inequalities (Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 14–15). On a more personal note, this article is offered as a protracted countergift to Brown’s reference to my very first scholarly publication, which had to do with the ambiguous status of radical renouncers in Theravada Buddhist countries (thus again confirming his ready interest in geographic and temporal contexts distant from his own realm of expertise).
- 3 Brown makes special mention of the early impact of the French school of the *Annales*, followed by that of British functional social anthropology and Mary Douglas in particular, later displaced by a combination of Foucault on the European side and Geertzian cultural anthropology, as well as Edward Shils on the American side. It is an additional sign of Brown’s intellectual stature that he did not hesitate to revisit himself, criticizing the weaknesses of his earlier interpretations, at times precisely as a result of new theoretical influences that helped him see things he did not pay attention to before, or ask other or better questions. For self-accounts of his intellectual trajectory, see Brown 1983, 1998, 2000, 2003.
- 4 Gifts and gift-exchange, however, also appear in Brown’s writings in the context of relations of patronage, not necessarily religious in kind and with no relation to pious giving or manifestations of the holy.
- 5 Gift-related themes do not appear yet in Brown’s first important article on the holy man (Brown 1971) – despite its stress on the holy man’s functions of patronage, a context in which Brown was otherwise sensitive to the part played by gifts – nor its 1983 and 1998 revisitings (Brown 1983, 1998). On the holy man as servant of God and spiritual “patron,” offering petitions to God on behalf of others, see Brown 1971: 73.
- 6 I shall not be able here to do justice to the wealth and complexity of Brown’s rendering of this dynamic, synergetic relation between holiness and the gift throughout the voluminous corpus of his writings, but only touch upon it as reflected in Brown’s explicit treatments of religious gift-processes as such.
- 7 Significantly, this silence also applies to eminent fellow historians of whom he was obviously and most keenly aware, such as Paul Veyne, whom I shall return to below, or Natalie Z. Davis, his colleague at Princeton University, and famed author in 2000 of *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*. Neither does he refer to any of the rich upsurge of

- research on gift-exchange – by either classicists or medievalists – that marked the 1980s – one of the signal fruits of what appears now in hindsight as a “golden age” of rapprochement between history and anthropology.
- 8 Veyne wrote a preface to the publication in 1983 of a French translation of *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Brown 1978), *Genèse de l'antiquité tardive*. Brown on his side contributed a chapter on late antiquity to the first volume of *A History of Private Life* (1992) – which Veyne co-edited with Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby.
 - 9 For a fuller discussion of Veyne's legacy to research on the gift and his own ambiguous relation to Mauss, see Silber 2004, 2007. Veyne combines a deeply historical and contextualizing perspective with a flexible, modular typological conception. Euergetism is posited at the nexus of what are presented as three basic “themes,” or “invariants.” Yet these basic, analytic invariants need not always appear together and may emerge in different combinations in different concrete historical contexts. This makes for a sort of not only typological, but even grammar-like, structuralist strain of thinking in Veyne's argument, which remains utterly foreign to Brown's style of work.
 - 10 My interests thus happen to dovetail with those of Mitchell Dean, in a review essay regrettably encountered at a very late stage in the writing of the present article, where he similarly underscores the relevance of both Paul Veyne's and Peter Brown's work for social scientists in general, and those interested in the gift in particular, with a focus on possible implications for current debates on the welfare state (Dean 1994).
 - 11 This also contradicts Mauss's overall stance in many other writings characteristically sensitive to cultural variability and indeed hostile to all forms of essentialism (see also Karsenti 1994, 325ff.).
 - 12 See, for example, Parry 1986; Silber 1995; Caillé 2000, 2009; N.Z. Davis 2000; Vandavelde 2000; Hénaff 2002, 2009; Osteen 2002; Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen 2003; Komter 2005; Chanial 2010. For a fuller discussion of such trends, see Silber 2007.
 - 13 This could include a very wide range of public endeavors, such as construction of monuments and public buildings (temples, baths, amphitheaters), banquets and festivals, military campaigns, gladiator fights, athletic games, learning institutions, and so on.
 - 14 All Christians, be they wealthy or not, were expected to give. As a result, “unlike the cities and their proud temples, the Christian churches were never entirely dependent on the generosity of a few wealthy donors” (Brown 1996: 30). And again: “In a world where almsgiving was practiced by everyone, Christianized euergetism, though memorable, was not the only way in which wealth now reached the poor” (Brown 2002: 78).
 - 15 Brown also repeatedly pays tribute to the contribution of Evelyne Patlagean's research in such regard.
 - 16 “For women had been the other blank on the map of the classical city. It was assumed that gift-giving was an act of politics, not an act of mercy; and politics was for men only. By contrast, the Christian church, from an early time, had encouraged women to take on a public role in their own right, in relation to the poor: they gave alms in person, they visited the sick, they founded shrines and poorhouses in their own name and were expected to be fully visible as participants in the ceremonial of the shrines” (Brown 1981: 46).
 - 17 Hénaff distinguishes between ceremonial, gracious, and solidary giving. In his definition, gracious (or oblatory) giving, for which he mainly gives examples of giving in the framework of face-to-face private relationships (from parent to child, friend to

- friend, or lover to lover), is *unilateral* giving meant above all to make others happy (rather than meet a need), and without expectation of reciprocation. In contrast, *ceremonial* gift-giving, is always *reciprocal*, while *solidary* giving, which entails extending aid to someone in need, can be either reciprocal or not.
- 18 or a fuller treatment of the idea of repertoires of giving, see Silber 2000, 2002, 2007. While in tune with the idea of a repertoire of exchange (J. Davis 1992), and that of a repertoire of "transaction modes" (Algazi 2003), it avoids the automatic subsuming of gift processes under notions of exchange and transaction, leaving the relation between these three notions open to further investigation.
 - 19 Brown sees this as the result of "an unprecedented 'democratization' of religious expertise and leadership, previously the domain of the high-born and independently wealthy, that had affected many other cults and not only Christianity: persons of the lower and middle classes, who found it difficult enough to support themselves in normal conditions, now entered in increasing numbers into the higher enterprise of religion; not being persons of independent means, they had to be supported by others" (Brown 2002: 20).
 - 20 It is worth noting the affinities of this argument with the third "theme" or "invariant" of euergetic giving fleetingly suggested by Veyne, namely, the anxiety about the afterlife, memory, and search for eternity.
 - 21 For a major advance in that direction in the context of early Christian monasticism in particular, see Caner 2006.
 - 22 The literature on the *wagf* and *sedāqa* is by now extensive and relates to various phases and areas in the history of Islamic civilizations, though seldom related to gift research and theory. For a special emphasis on the public sphere, see Hoexter 2002. See also the articles by Yehoshua Frenkel, Steven Heydeman, and Yaacov Lev in Frenkel and Lev 2009. From a very different sociological perspective, also highlighting the affinities with civic euergetism, see Isin and Lefebvre 2005. Reaching beyond the limits of this paper, an area of research of much relevance is the immobilization of wealth "for eternity" via the institution of foundations.

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Further Reading

The following readings listed in the References are of particular usefulness in providing students with an orientation to the ideas discussed in this paper: Parry 1986; N.Z. Davis 2000; Laidlaw 2000; Brown 2002; Silber 2002; Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen 2003.

Gifts for God, Gifts for Rabbis: From Sacrifice to Donation in Rabbinic Tales of Late Antiquity and Their Dialogue with Early Christian Texts

GALIT HASAN-ROKEM

In most societies, gift-giving characteristically entails interactions that traverse various group boundaries such as class, age, and gender. In addition to its material and instrumental value, the gift itself as a phenomenon is associated with a plethora of symbolical values. The most intriguing discussions around gifts and gift-giving have addressed the complex configurations of the relationship between the actual gift and the act of transferring it from giver or givers to receiver or receivers, and how these configurations have further reverberated in the wider cultural context.¹

This is also the key axis of Marcel Mauss's pathbreaking study, *The Gift* (Mauss 1990), that has animated our joint endeavor. In his characteristically historical-anthropological investigation, Mauss operated with the concept of reciprocity as a primary index for the typology of various kinds of gift-giving. In the vein of the anthropology of his period, Mauss emphasized the difference between premodern and modern societies and correlated the variation in gift-giving to sociostructural differences. Without adopting his sociohistorical typologies I find it useful to maintain the reference to reciprocity as one of the theoretical guidelines, especially the way in which it illuminates positions, exchanges, and exertions of power. Taking into account later discussions of Mauss's work and especially Ilana Silber's nuanced suggestion to systematize the relationship between sacrifice and gift (Silber 2002), I shall peruse what seems to me to be a series of narrative reflections on this relationship in late antique rabbinic literature. The reading is further inspired by Silber's refinement of the concept of reciprocity in the present volume. My reading of the texts from *Leviticus Rabbah* – generally considered an exegetical and homiletical compilation relating to the biblical Leviticus produced in fifth-century

Tiberias in the Galilee – suggests both an awareness on the part of their makers of the existence of the above-mentioned relationship between sacrifice and gift, and perhaps also a consciously systematic conceptualization of the historical dimension of the variations in that relationship extant in their own culture.

Giving the Soul: The Historical Perspective of Sacrifice and After

The gifts given in late-antique rabbinic literature and in *Leviticus Rabbah* in particular are embedded in narratives linked to exegetical passages pertaining to biblical texts on the one hand and to historical figures on the other hand, thus expressing the characteristic hermeneutical operations of rabbinic narratives triangulating history, text, and an existential moment of experience. Following the above-mentioned tendency of narrated acts of gift-giving to cross group boundaries, some of these gift tales also function in the context of *narrative dialogues* between rabbinic culture and its neighbors (Hasan-Rokem 2003). Here, as in the texts analyzed in my earlier work, the relevant narrative dialogues are especially in the context of the Roman Empire and with early Christianity. The study of late antique rabbinic texts on the topic of the gift in antiquity from an ethnographic and folk literary perspective is pertinent particularly for two reasons: first, since stories about gifts are often replete with social and contextual information; second, because gifts are also a popular detail in folk narratives (Aarne and Thompson 1961: 170–71; cf. Hasan-Rokem 1982: 69–77).

The Amoraic rabbis of late-antique Galilee, whose textual production comprises much of what is usually called aggadic literature, devoted large portions of their discursive practice to the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible canon, and in particular to the Five Books of Moses from which their moral, ritual, and behavioral code was explicitly extrapolated. Leviticus, the third of the five books, has the most concentrated corpus of laws and ordinances addressing the function of Israelite priests (Knohl 1995: 137–48; Watts 2007), a fact that is also reflected in the related *Leviticus Rabbah*. When addressing those parts of the Mosaic text that deal with the sacrifices initiated by Aaron and his sons in the desert tabernacle that served as a mythical basis for the ritual practices of the temple in Jerusalem, they were faced with a particular challenge because in their times, after the destruction of the temple, the sacrificial practices had more or less completely ceased, while the status of the priests and their rights to gifts were apparently at least partly maintained. Some scholars have maintained that this was devised by the rabbinic leadership to confirm priestly particularity both in its aspect of ritual purity and with regard to the sacerdotal gifts as a strategy to counter Christian claims that Jewish practices were abolished due to the destruction of the temple as a punishment for rejecting the messianic/divine identity of Jesus (Alon 1980: 253–60). Like rabbinic discourses on other practices that were rendered obsolete as the temple in Jerusalem ceased to fill its centralizing function in Israelite religion, such as the testing of the

woman suspected of adultery, the discourses addressing sacrificial rituals must also be understood as transformed into cultural work on something else (Rosen-Zvi 2008; cf. Stern 1986: 119), and in the case of the texts that will be discussed below, something relevant for the society and individuals of the third- to fifth-century Galilean Jews within the rabbinic cultural sphere. I propose here that gifts in general and sacrificial and sacerdotal gifts in particular are explorations into processes of transformation, especially transformations of identity but also more unspecified kinds of spiritual, psychological, and especially symbolical transformation (Handelman 1996; Stroumsa 2009: e.g. 56, 67; Hasan-Rokem 2010). Ultimately the transformation aimed at in *Leviticus Rabbah* is at least partly a state of holiness in a world in which the cultic options for achieving it are diminished. In this it performs the same textual ritual that Wilken has observed in Origen's homilies on Leviticus, not merely making "Leviticus' cultic language moral" but also making "Christian moral discourse cultic" (Wilken 1995: 90). Origen stands out among his Christian colleagues in his interest in both Jewish practices and beliefs (De Lange 1976: 41), and in Leviticus (Stökl Ben Ezra 2003: 265; Stewart 2010; the rich bibliography on Origen's and rabbinical interpretations of the Song of Songs cannot be dealt with here), which is often overlooked by them because of its ritualistic focus. Moreover, a convergence with *Leviticus Rabbah* has been found in his exegetical and homiletical work (Stökl Ben Ezra 2003: 110, 125, 279).

Silber's work criticizes Mauss's essay on the gift by comparing it to his own earlier essay—coauthored with Henri Hubert (Mauss and Hubert 1964)—on the sacrifice, pointing at the need for "more ethnological, anthropological or historical research" to substantiate especially ideas about the historically transformative relations between sacrifices and gifts. Providing a folk literary and partly microhistorical analysis informed by an ethnographical view of the texts in question, I seek to enrich the "empirical" basis sought by Silber. Her work follows in its systematic approach especially the work of Evans-Pritchard and in its nuanced detail Alan Caillé and others (Silber 2002: 292), in order to correlate sacrifice and gift, making their dialectic of diversity and unity apparent. I shall interpret the texts with her tripartite model in mind: "giving to the gods (including but not exhausted by sacrifice), giving to religious institutions or religious specialists ... sacerdotal giving), and giving to the poor and needy (charitable giving)" (Silber 2002: 299). Unlike her emphasis on the internal ritual transformation in postbiblical Judaism from sacrifice to prayer (cf. Bokser 1983), the case I analyze will, due to its institutional background in the rabbinic sphere, highlight the transformation from priestly rituals, sacrifice in particular, to the study of Scripture as well as to material support for the students of Scripture (cf. Stroumsa 2009: 56–83, who refers to rabbinic literature alongside early Christian texts, which are consulted by him in more detail).

A set of two narrative chains from *Leviticus Rabbah* will be analyzed below to show how transformations of identity performed as embodied acts of gift-giving pertain to the specific cultural historical situation involving the disappearance of the sacrificial practices specifically mentioned in the Torah. The Torah itself as a text given by God to humans and studied by humans in honor of God will be

shown to be the axis on which the transformation is carried out: the tales dramatize the transposition from the fulfillment of the priestly sacrificial commandments – a highly ritualized form of gift-giving – to gift-giving associated with the study of Torah in the ultimate of rabbinic institutions, the academy, *beth ha-midrash*. I shall trace the transformations in each narrative chain separately and between the two chains, focusing on the cultural negotiations taking place in the texts with regard to the problem as formulated above. The location of both narrative chains in *Leviticus Rabbah*, the aggadic midrash compilation shaped by Palestinian Amoraic sages with direct reference to the Mosaic book of the priests, Leviticus, is highly significant. The reference to Leviticus lays bare the source of the need for the cultural negotiation, namely, the tension between the explicit commandments of the priestly code on the one hand, and the normative system of the rabbis with the study of Scripture, and in this case the historicizing interpretation of Scripture, at its center, on the other hand.

Chapter 3 of *Leviticus Rabbah* opens with a quote and a *petihta* (proem, cf. Heinemann 1971c) comprising all of paragraph 1, referring to Leviticus 2:1: “When anyone presents an offering of meal to the Lord, his offering shall be of choice flour (*solet*) (Milgrom 1991: 179); he shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it [verse 2: and present it to Aaron’s sons, the priests, etc.]”² The verse includes both the vital association of *nefesh* – the word here translated as “anyone” – and the act of offering (*minḥa*) the sacrifice to God, as well as the reference to the frankincense producing the sweet odor in which the contact with the Lord materializes (*reyah niḥoah*, cf. Genesis 7:21 where the sacrifice of Noah after the Deluge produces a covenantal *and* a universal association). The various meanings of *nefesh* in biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, ranging from “anyone” or “person” as in the verse quoted above and many other Hebrew Bible instances, to “soul” as the locus of emotion and cognizance in general, and devotion in particular, are important for the interpretation below.³ The term is often associated with creation, life, taboo-breaking, sin, murder, sacrifice, covenant, and intimacy with the divine. This wide and rather open semantic range creates a site of dynamic instability of meaning that also enables the various operations within and across the identities potentially available for the textual world in question, paralleled by the wide range of usages of the word ψυχή in the New Testament (Vine 1966: 54–55; Danker 2000: 1098–1100).

Adopting Joseph Heinemann’s groundbreaking view on the compositional poetics of *Leviticus Rabbah* (Heinemann 1971a, 1971b; cf. Stern 1986: 106–8), I usually read the narratives of this work in the context of the chapters in which they appear (e.g., Hasan-Rokem 2003). In this case, the focus on the wider context of the discussion on gifts and sacrifices produces some new structural insights. This is how Heinemann himself briefly introduced the structure of the passage preceding the narratives focused on here, at the beginning of chapter 3 – a poetical exemplar of his model:

In ... chapter III of Leviticus Rabba – the first proem elucidates Eccl. 4:6 in a variety of ways, interpreting it in its concluding (and relevant) section: “‘Better is a handful of quietness’, that is a handful of flour of the meal-offering of a poor man, ‘than two

handfuls of labour and striving after wind', that is the incense of spices of the congregation ..." (on the basis of two plays on words: *nabat* and *minhab*, *ruah* and *reah*, i.e., "a sweet savour"). The second proem opens with Ps. 22:24f. and concludes: "For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction (*'enuth* is understood, apparently, in the sense of utterance) of the lowly; even as he despises not his prayer, he despises not his offering." The third proem emphasizes that God "pardons abundantly" (Isa. 55:7), hence, he provided us with an additional – inexpensive – means of obtaining forgiveness, namely the tenth of an *ephah* of flour making up the meal-offering. The body of the sermon begins here – by no means the patterns of all homilies – with the question, "What is written prior to this matter?" and refers to the end of chap. 1, dealing with the burnt-offering of a fowl, which, being comparatively cheap, may also be considered a poor man's sacrifice. This serves as a connecting link for introducing the charming folktale of King Agrippas. (Heinemann 1971a: 145)

The first set of narrative texts that I shall analyze are from *Lev. Rab.* 3.5, and refer to Leviticus 1:17 (the offering of birds) rather than to the leading text of the chapter, Leviticus 2:1 (the offering of flour):

"The priest shall tear it open by its wings, without severing it, and turn it into smoke on the altar, upon the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt sacrifice, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord (Leviticus 1:17)." Said Rabbi Yohanan: When a simpleton (layman, *hedyot*) smells the odor of its wings (feathers) his soul (*nafšo*) shudders (*solelet*), but You (the Torah) said: let him approach the altar?! (cf. *Tosefta*, Terumah 4.10. Zuckerman 2004: 556) Why all this? So that the altar will be beautified (*mehuddar*) by the sacrifice of the poor. King Agrippa requested to sacrifice a thousand [variant: forty] burnt offerings (*'olot*) in one day. He sent [a message] to the [variant: high] priest, saying: Let no man except for me sacrifice today. A poor man came with two [male] doves in his hands and told [the priest]: sacrifice these for me. He [the priest] said to him: The King ordered me to let no man except for him sacrifice today. [The poor man] told him: My lord, the priest, I catch four every day; two, I sacrifice and of two I make my living. If you don't sacrifice them you will cut off my livelihood. He [the priest] took them and sacrificed them. King Agrippa saw (or: was shown) in a dream: The sacrifice of a poor man preceded yours. He sent [a message] to the priest, saying: Didn't I tell you: "Let no man except for me sacrifice today"? Said [the priest]: My lord, the king, a poor man came with two [male] doves in his hands and told me: Sacrifice these for me. I told him: The King ordered me to let no man except for him sacrifice today. He told me: I catch four every day; two, I sacrifice and of two I make my living. If you don't sacrifice them you will cut off my livelihood. Did I not have to sacrifice (alternative translations: Shouldn't I have sacrificed? Or: Wasn't I obliged to sacrifice?) He [the King] said to him: All you did, you did well. (Margalioth 1972: 1:65–67)⁴

Two genres are intertwined in the narrative, a historical legend – although with minimal historical details: for example, Jerusalem is not mentioned – and a moral tale (cf. Hasan-Rokem 2003: 97–102, analyzing *Lev. Rab.* 25.5). There are two givers: the king and the poor man. God, who is explicitly and from the outset the receiver of the gifts that constitute a cosmological contact between heaven and earth by the means of the "pleasing odor," is also embodied in the hortative

formulation preceding the narrative itself, “You (the Torah) said: let him approach the altar of the law.” The intervention of God, obviously omniscient, is also implied in the king’s dream, a communicative mode between the worlds in parallel to the sacrifice and in the opposite direction to the human gift, thus a divine gift, marking reciprocity (cf. Oppenheim 1956; Cox Miller 1994: 49–51 and ample references; Stroumsa 1999: 191–227; Hasan-Rokem 2000: 91–92; Alvstad 2010: 119; Weiss 2011: 57–62). It is the dream that finally enables the denouement of the conflict by activating the mediator priest to achieve the ultimate goal formulated earlier in the apparent oxymoron: “So that the altar will be beautified (*mehuddar*) by the sacrifice of the poor.”

The audience of the tale may be construed as either the audience of an oral homily including the tale (as J. Mann, J. Heinemann, A. Shinan, M. Bergman – and some others – have proposed by emphasizing the orally performed synagogue homily as the textual basis of *Leviticus Rabbah* and some other contemporary texts), or the readers of the text including ourselves (as implicitly or explicitly expressed, for instance, in the works of J. Fraenkel, J. Levinson, D. Stein, and others). The synagogue associated with both priests and devotional gifts – discussed by Michael Satlow with special reference to gifts and to *Leviticus Rabbah* in particular (Satlow 2010) – seems the most suitable scene for the oral performance of these tales.

As if echoing the central role of intertextuality in rabbinic culture (Boyarin 1990), quoting creates a specific form of intertextuality in this tale: the priest quotes the king to explain why he intends to prevent the poor man’s sacrifice; the poor man quotes his quotidian sacrificial practice to justify his request that the priest precede the king’s sacrifice; the priest quotes his exchange with the poor man (absent in one ms.); the king quotes his own command to tilt back the scales; and the midrash text, therefore the rabbis, quotes the book of the priestly code of Leviticus from the Torah in the double exposure of the midrashic operation, providing the ideological umbrella for the entire construct.

In a demonstratively harmonizing tone, the tale ends with a host of receivers, and no real losers (the birds being sacrificed not counting). The poor man receives the privilege of making his daily offering in order to continue to gain his daily bread. The priest receives the sacrifice; and although it would seem that the priest is the real loser in this case (as the thousand oxen sacrificed by the king would clearly have enriched the table of the priests), in fact since it is burnt offerings – from which nothing is supposed to remain – that are being discussed, the priest’s potential gains are actually nonexistent; but he too may be seen as a receiver by saving himself an enormous job, a point that is not explicitly made in the tale. (On the other hand, the prestige lost by not handling the king’s enormous sacrifice is also not pointed out in the narrative.) The king receives the teaching of a moral that will serve him in his various interactions both with the people and with God. The greatest receiver seems to be the Lord God, who receives the *nefeš* that he famously desires (e.g., Leviticus 17:11; 14; cf. Isaiah 1:11–13; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51:18–19), in addition to the whole tale being consistently sustained by quotes from his Torah. It remains open to discussion whom “the altar ... beautified

(*mehuddar*) by the sacrifice of the poor” honors more: the poor man, the priest, or God – or perhaps the king who in a sense embodies divine order on earth in general and among his Jewish subjects in particular.⁵

The narrative relates to the Herodian dynasty ruling under Roman rule, an ambivalent kingship for the rabbis. D.R. Schwartz has, on the one hand, suggested that “the notion that [rabbinic literature] loves Agrippa is based upon misunderstandings and exaggerations” (D.R. Schwartz 1990: 117), presenting a valuable general caveat against the use of rabbinic sources for historical writing (Schwartz 1990: 158 n. 44). On the other hand, he proposed that Josephus’s treatment of Agrippa I without any hostility (Schwartz 1990: 157) may be due to the personal relationship between them (Schwartz 1990: 157). Schwartz characterizes Agrippa’s behavior in the tale analyzed here as “Mr. Important who usually seeks great honor but now and then passes it up so as to reap additional praise in its stead” (Schwartz 1990: 165), showing that sometimes even abstaining from sacrifice fosters reciprocity. J. Fraenkel has characterized the narrative as a folk narrative (Fraenkel 1981: 129–30), which in his parlance usually stands for an insult, reflecting his general disdain for the literary quality of Palestinian Amoraic narrative art, especially in comparison with the Babylonian Talmud. Fraenkel calls the king’s behavior boastful and the closure of the tale “banal,” whereas similar endings in the Babylonian Talmud gain the praise of being “moral” or “spiritual.” Not heeding Schwartz’s (later) caveat, D. Goodblatt’s brief treatment of the tale, among other rabbinical sources, serves to prove that Agrippa did not necessarily side with the Pharisees (Goodblatt 1987: 14).

From my perspective – as I read the tale as part of a larger poetic construct performing and reflecting the rabbinic transformation from sacrifice to sacerdotal donation – turning an earthly, for-the-rabbis-not-easily-digestible royalty into a divinely guided monarch (presumably the popular Agrippa I, but Agrippa II’s clashes with priesthood may also resound in the tale) adds up with the other harmonious and compensatory elements of the tale to complete the act of transformation that is here textually performed. Moreover, this textually performed transformation – as part of rabbinic learning – is in itself a transformation of the transformative ritual of sacrifice terminated by the temple’s destruction.

A number of potentially disharmonious moments reveal the inherent tension of the situation looming in the tale. Thus, the small change occurring in the repeated formula first uttered as “My lord, the priest” by the poor man in his plea – note, not at his initial approaching of the priest – then as “My lord, the king” by the priest explaining his apparent disobedience to the royal decree is, on the one hand, a concrete expression of the transformative process taking place in the tale. On the other hand, the formula marks a clear hierarchy of power in which the poor man is the weakest. The variation in the exhortation points at the invisibility and inaudibility of the true lord, the one in heaven, whose wishes can only be interpreted and hopefully fulfilled – for the well-being of individuals as well as the community – by interpreting the text and by interpreting would-be celestial signs such as dreams – ultimately also encoded as texts.

The instability of the harmony is further revealed in the two additional tales concatenated in the paragraph. In *Leviticus Rabbah*, even more than in other rabbinical collections and the Talmuds, the full meaning of narratives becomes clear only when studying them in relationship to their textual framework and especially with other narratives in their vicinity, because of the highly sophisticated editorial tactics applied by its editor(s) (Heinemann 1971a, 1971b). The first of the additional tales in the paragraph seems to reinforce the socially equalizing message of the tale of King Agrippa and the poor man. An unconventional mode of sacrifice is introduced when the chicory leaves fed to an ox by the poor man are, again in a dream, recognized as a sacrifice. Thus the complex transformative process displayed in King Agrippa and the poor man's tale is here comprised in a truncated form that apparently presupposes the previous reading of the longer tale:

Ma'ase (פרֹאֲזִיץ)⁶ regarding an ox that was being dragged to be sacrificed, but it would not be dragged. A poor man came and had in his hands a bunch of chicory and offered it to [the ox], which ate it and lowed and ejected a thorn (needle?) and let itself be dragged to being sacrificed. The owner of the ox saw (or: "was shown") in a dream: The sacrifice of a poor man preceded yours. (Margalioth 1972: 67)

The narrative point of view of this tale shifts the focus of reciprocity set above from the sacrificing agents to the sacrificed "objects." At the receiving end stand, paradoxically and perhaps ironically, the ox who is fed chicory, a very simple kind of food (frequently mentioned in classical literature: for example, Horace's diet: "As for me, olives, endives [*chicorea*], and mallows provide sustenance" [Horace *Odes* 31.15]), and the owner of the ox whose sacrifice finally materializes, as well as presumably the visibly and aurally absent priest and God. Fraenkel (1981: 131–32) has even suggested that as in the first tale of the chain, here too the poor man's sacrifice precedes, since by feeding the ox the chicory leaves, the poor man made the animal his own.

In the next tale of the chain the mode of the narrative turns from slight irony to blunt satire:

Ma'ase (פרֹאֲזִיץ) regarding a poor woman who brought a handful (*komets*) of cream of wheat (*solet*) and the priest scorned her: Look (*re'u*, verb pl. masc.) what they sacrifice (*magrivot*, verb pl. fem.)! What is in it to eat and what is in it to sacrifice?! The priest saw (or: was shown) in a dream: Do not scorn her! It is as if she were sacrificing her soul (*nafša hiqriva*). This is an argument *a minore ad maius* (*qal va-homer*): if it is written "his soul" (*nafšo*) regarding whosoever does not bring a soul, then one who brings the soul all the more is as one who sacrifices [verb fem.] her soul. (Margalioth 1972: 67–68)

Whereas the Agrippa tale had temporarily moved back from the leading verse of *Leviticus Rabbah* 3, that is, Leviticus 2:1, the last tale returns to its combination of soul and cream of wheat, *nefesh* and *solet*. Moving from an apparently resolved conflict between the priestly class and the unprivileged, represented in the two earlier tales by poor men, this last tale widens the gates of strife by adding gender to the oppositional

configuration by addressing the sacrifice of a woman and ultimately of women in general. As in so many other rabbinic narratives – and in *Leviticus Rabbah* – there are many examples of this: female presence may mark the flaring of a previously merely latent conflict by embodying the opposition in the most intimately experienced and probably most frequently encountered nexus, male/female, a relationship that in general is often hidden as tacit knowledge behind more publicly visible and acknowledged forms of cognizance. While there is no king in this tale, the priest is – unlike in the set-up of the tale of the ox – the most present person whose voice and words create the drama. After having scorned the woman, not even addressing her directly but rather as an absentee in the third person, he is countered by a dream proclaiming the will of God in direct quotes from the Torah (absent in one ms.), conclusively bringing back the focus to the *nefesh*, so vital to sacrifice in general,⁷ embodied in the woman, and accomplishing the transformative move from carnal sacrifice to the gift of the soul, necessitated by the historical situation, as noted above. Brown's observation about gift-giving having become a new public role for women in early Christian circles (quoted in Silber, this volume) seems thus to have at least some counterparts in rabbinic literature as well. The function of dreams as gifts sent from the divine to the human realm, in all three tales, emphasizes the parallel to the sacrifices sent from below upward – marking the reciprocity of the interactions. In a clear structural opposition, the sacrifices move from the sacrifice of meat – maximally represented by the most powerful male – through the mixed meat and vegetable sacrifice – oscillating between the rich man and the poor man – to the purely vegetable offering of the woman. In a constellation similar to the one revealed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his seminal study, the myth – understood by me under his influence as a generative cognitive structure producing cultural creativity in general, rather than as a genre – performs the transformation in which structural oppositions evolve “confronting us with a double, reciprocal exchange of functions” (Lévi-Strauss 1967b: 224; cf. Williams 1977). Thus meat is to vegetable as male is to female, and as powerful is to powerless, but through the dynamic process of the myth, eventually the vegetable element that embodies the soul, trumps the meat and weakens it.

The three tales accomplish the first stage of the social transposition from sacrifice conducted by priests to a new mode of gift-giving, likewise – and even more – involving the soul, whose beneficiaries are, as we shall see, the authors of the text, the rabbis. (cf. Levine 1985: 71; Hezser 1997: 268–69).

The Treasure in the Field: The Sociopolitical Dialogue of Texts, Gifts, and Identities

The principle of preferring the gift of the soul rather than sacrifice performs a quite obvious dialogue with the sources of early Christian thought where the issue is often approached through the critical stance to sacrifice expressed by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isaiah 1:11; Amos 5:22) but also articulated with reference to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ (e.g., Matthew 9:13; 12:7, both with

reference to Hosea 6:6. See also Mark 12:33 and Romans 12:1 and especially Hebrews 10:1–12). I offer a different perspective from the stance of S. Schwartz who in his book on the matter of euergetism in the chapter on the Palestinian rabbis is all but silent on Christian views (S. Schwartz 2010: 110–65). A parable, rather than an “act,” touching on this issue is included in the Matthew passage proclaiming the gift of the kingdom of heaven: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

The comparison brings out a clear difference: the poor bird-catcher in *Leviticus Rabbah* is not giving away all of his catch, but rather half of it, never giving up his own livelihood (cf. Silber 2002: 304, characterizing Jewish sources in general as discouraging excessive charitable giving). Unlike the promise in Matthew, the tale of the bird-catcher and the two tales accompanying it in the paragraph do not so much account for an individual transformation but rather contribute to the collective, historical transformation of the Jews after the loss of the temple from their ritual life. The narrative framework that is situated in a past reality where sacrifice was still possible does definitively not promise that an imminent reward of the magnitude of the kingdom of heaven awaits the bird-catcher; the tale tells merely about his rather concrete belief that the continual sacrificing of half of his birds will ensure his livelihood. The parable of Jesus points at a much more revolutionary process of transformation, where a total renunciation by the individual is required in order to produce a wholly new collective identity and a wholly new individual existence. The kingdom of heaven, the promised reward for the renunciation, has been identified by scholars as the one of the most revolutionary concepts in the New Testament literature, especially in the Synoptic Gospels and in particular in the passages considered *ipsissima verba Jesu* (Dodd 1961; Flusser 1988: 102–14, 123, 495, 510, 554–60).

The narrative dialogue that I suggest took place on this topic between Jewish and Christian tales (cf. Jeremias 1972: 199, for other dialogues), presumably in the Galilee of the first two and a half centuries of the millennium, is intensified in another *Leviticus Rabbah* text more or less directly addressing the parable of the treasure hidden in the field:

The leading verse of chapter 5 of *Leviticus Rabbah* is “If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord, lay his hand on the bull’s head and kill the bull before the Lord” (Leviticus 4:3; New King James Version [NKJV]). The very beginning of the chapter, in paragraph 1, presents a transposition from the biblical language of sacrifice to the rabbinical language of Torah learning. The halakhic context both in *Leviticus Rabbah* and in the Palestinian Talmud passage *y. Hor.* 3.6 (*Talmud Yerushalmi* 2001: 1427–28), including all three tales that will be discussed below, relates to the order of sacrificing individuals according to rank and office (priest, man, woman, etc.) and thus directly to the theme of the King Agrippa tale analyzed above.⁸ Thus the text enhances the cultural work initiated in the passage from *Lev. Rab.* 3.5 that has been analyzed above, but in a linear fashion also indicates the next historical stage, from sacrifice to donation.

This order of things reinforces the sense of a contemplated compositional poetics of *Leviticus Rabbah*, as was suggested by J. Heinemann (1971a, 1971b). Heinemann, however, addressed primarily the inner structure of the chapters (Heinemann 1971b: 810, 822–23); I am carrying the idea a step further by pointing out connections between chapters, a possibility that may also be understood as suggested by Heinemann with special regard to the idealization of the priests in *Lev. Rab.* 6 in addition to *Lev. Rab.* 3.6, where it appears as a dialectical opposition (his terminology) to the priest who humiliates the woman in 3.5, whereas priests are also criticized in chapter 5.

I thus read paragraph 4 of chapter 5 as a fulfillment of the transformation from sacrifice to textual gift by introducing narratives of gift-giving related to Torah learning in the form of support for the sages:

Rabbi Abbahu said: “Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land” (Deuteronomy 12:19; NKJV). What is written after that? “When the Lord your God enlarges your border ...” (Deuteronomy 12:20; NKJV). And what is the relationship between the two? The Holy One Blessed Be He said: According to your gift it will be enlarged for you. Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Aha [said]: A servant brings an ox and his master brings a lamb, the servant goes before the master, as we have learnt (*Mishna*, early third century CE, *m. Hor.* 3.6): “The ox of the anointed priest [*kohen mašiah*] and the ox of the community – the ox of the anointed goes before the ox of the community for all acts.” “A man’s [*adam* = human’s] gift makes room for him, and gives him access to the great [men]” (Proverbs 18:16; the translation is synthesized from the NKJV and the JPS Bibles; the translation of the story according to Satlow 2010, with some changes):

Ma‘ase (παῖς) regarding Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Aqiva who went to the region of Antioch (cf. *ḥolat antiokhia* [some variant readings have here *ḥilata*] to *hamat antiokhia*, in the same chapter parag. 3, Margalioth 1972: 105) to collect financial support for the sages (*magbit hakhamim*; variants include *magbit hokhma*; *magbit tsaqa*). There was there a certain Abba Yudan, who would “do a *mitsva*” (i.e., give charity) generously and he became poor. When he saw our masters (literally, rabbis – I retain “master” to underline the connection between class and sacrifice that figured already in the first cluster of tales analyzed here) he went up to his house⁹ with a sickly face (note the assonance between *ḥolat antiokhia* and *u-fanav ḥolaniyot*). His wife¹⁰ asked him: Why is your face sickly? (From this point the narrative switches from Hebrew to Aramaic). He told her the story: Our masters are here and I don’t know what I will do for them. His wife, who was a righteous woman (*tsadeket*; the laudatory clause is absent in a number of mss), what did she say to him? Don’t you still have a single field? Go, sell half of it and give it to them. He went and did so. When he gave it to them they said to him, God will replace your loss. Our masters left. He went out to plow. When he had plowed half of his field, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave light to his eyes and the earth split before him and his cow fell in and [its leg] was broken. He descended to lift her (the Hebrew language lacks the gender neutral form) up and found under her a treasure. He said: For my benefit was the leg of my cow broken.¹¹ When our masters [the rabbis] returned again they asked about this Abba

Yudan, how he was doing (the dialogue with the locals is absent in some of the mss). They [the locals] said: Who is able to see the face of Abba Yudan, Abba Yudan of the [many] goats, Abba Yudan of the [many] donkeys, Abba Yudan of the [many] camels. He [Abba Yudan] came to them [the rabbis] and said: "Your prayer for me produced profit (literally 'fruits') and profit on profit (literally 'fruits of fruit')." They told him: Even though another man gave more than you, we have written you at the top of the list. And they took him and seated him close to themselves and proclaimed regarding him: "A man's gift makes room for him, and gives him access to the great [men]." (Margalioth 1972: 110–13; cf. Visotzky 2003: 121–34)¹²

Michael Satlow's treatment of the Abba Yudan tale in the wider context of gift-giving in biblical, Hellenistic Jewish, and rabbinic contexts emphasizes the connection with the synagogue as a locus for Jewish generosity (Satlow 2005). Satlow further deconstructs the gap that according to some scholars existed between the sages and nonrabbinical Jews by mentioning devotional practices of votive gifts and donations as well as priestly gifts, which were not necessarily conceptualized as *mitsvot*, observing that "these votive inscriptions thus represent 'popular religion' by which I mean simply a pervasive religious sentiment not necessarily reflected in what would later become the 'canonical' texts" (Satlow 2005: 103–4 n. 23).

The narrative of Abba Yudan consists of a dominant moral tale plot into which a miraculous folktale is interwoven with the finding of the treasure, in an intergeneric combination achieving the characteristic semiotic density of rabbinic storytelling, found also in other tales of *Leviticus Rabbah* (cf. Hasan-Rokem 2003: 97–102, analyzing *Lev. Rab.* 25.5). The most important gift turns out to be – unsurprisingly – the Proverbs 18:16 quote uttered by the sages in honor of the protagonist.

As in the case of the Agrippa tale from *Lev. Rab.* 3.5, the Abba Yudan tale too serves as the first tale in a chain of three. As in the first chain discussed in this article, in the second chain, too, the general structure of the first narrative is repeated in weaker articulations and with interesting variations in the tales following it. Whereas the two short narratives following the Agrippa tale unsettle the seemingly harmonious and morally satisfactory closure of the first, fullest, and most complex tale, in the second chain of tales, in chapter 5, the two narratives added to the Abba Yudan tale reinforce the harmony. This may be due to the fact that in the historical reality in which the Abba Yudan tale is set, the phenomenon of the demise of sacrifice is already a fact and thus does not present a concrete and emotionally challenging potential of contact with the divine. Even the gender tension that was demonstrated in the last tale in chapter 3 discussed above has no trace in the tales of chapter 5. On the contrary, the woman, Abba Yudan's wife, enables the harmonious relationship with the rabbis and reinforces Brown's above-mentioned observation regarding women's contributions to practices of giving and economical support to various religious individuals and institutions. The fact that women are excluded even more from rabbinic learning than from the temple services, where they have a presence – albeit marginal – in sacrificing, seems to have been integrated with no further opposition in chapter 5. The following two narratives reinforce the harmonizing pattern of the Abba Yudan tale:

Rabbi Hiyya Bar Abba made a collection of donations (*psiqa lemitan*) in a house of study (*midraša*) in Tiberias. One from the family of Silony [ms variants: Sileny; Siliany; Silwany; Silou] rose and donated a *ritla* (or *litra*) of gold. Rabbi Hiyya took him and seated him close to himself and proclaimed regarding him: “A man’s gift makes room for him [and gives him access to the great (men)].” (Margalioth 1972: 113; the tale is absent in some of the mss)

Here the collection of donations has been conveniently integrated into a house of study (*midraša*) in Tiberias, and Rabbi Hiyya, whose role in teaching the Torah both in the house of study as well as outside this rabbinical institution (Fraenkel 1987: 113–15) – and causing by that some disagreement – is well documented in the Talmudic-Midrashic corpus, presides over the embracing of the Silony family in the rabbinical bosom (a member of the Silony family is mentioned once again in Rabbi Hiyya’s company in another Palestinian Rabbinic source, *y. Šeb.* 3.1, *Talmud Yerushalmi* 2001: 186). The third tale of the chain remains roughly in the same region.

Resh Laqish went to Botsra [Tiberias in some mss]. There was an Abba Yudan (or Abun) “Liar” there. Don’t even think that he was a liar! Rather he was a liar in charity (*mitsvot*); he would see how much the community donated and then he would donate that same sum. Rabbi Shim’on Ben Laqish took him and seated him close to himself and proclaimed regarding him: “A man’s gift makes room for him [and gives him access to the great (men)].” (Margalioth 1972: 113–14; the story is absent in two mss)

The Resh Laqish story introduces a more controversial figure of the Tiberian rabbinical high society, who in this case is presented as active on the eastern side of the Jordan River, somewhat repeating the route of the three rabbis of the first tale in the chain, to the Antioch region. The trans-Jordanian town of Botsra, the capital of the Roman Provincia Arabia that figures in the short narrative, is famously associated with the outer limits of the rabbinic definition of the Land of Israel (see, e.g., the Rehov inscription; Habas 1995; cf. Klein 1912: 546). Resh Laqish is known to have debated the halakhic (rabbinical legal) status of Botsra with his teacher, friend, brother-in-law, and some say even object of erotic desire (Boyarin 1993: 215–16) Rabbi Yohanan. The trickster-like transformation of the first Abba Yudan into the Botsran eponymous Abba Yudan “the Liar,” who turns out to be no liar at all, brings out a parallel to Resh Laqish’s own biography who transformed from a *listēs* (robber) to a sage among sages (*b. B. Meši’a* 84a). Interestingly, Satlow has identified a certain Yudan bar Hezakya as one of the benefactors’ names listed in a synagogue in Geresh (Jerash), a large city east of the Jordan River (Satlow 2005: 93).

Whereas all three stories in the cluster demonstrate successful examples of rabbinical communal giving, this second chain of tales may also be interpreted in a wider perspective as constructing opportunities for opening the channels of communication between various segments of the rabbinical group to the traffic of both pecuniary and verbal gifts, enabling a social mobility parallel to mobility in and out of the Holy Land.

The hermeneutic connection that I have posited in the present discussion between the triad including the Agrippa tale and the triad including the Abba Yudan tale makes a claim about the construction of the category of communal generosity in support of the students of Torah in the context of rabbinic literature as a conscious cultural transformation of the sacrificial rituals of the temple. I am here adhering to the literary discipline's perspective of interpretation as a dynamic process between the reader and the – here only in general terms identifiable – “author/s,” in which the reception of the text in its esthetic and compositional framework is incorporated.

Although the chronologically earlier “event” as determined by the named participants – Agrippa and Abba Yudan – is situated earlier in the linear structure of the text, there is no evidence for its relative earliness as to the date of composition. There are, moreover, few possibilities to suggest a chronological order between the clusters. However, another connection, based on the foundational text of Leviticus, can be pointed out, I believe. The leading verse of chapter 5 of *Leviticus Rabbah*, in which paragraph 4 including the Abba Yudan tale is embedded is Leviticus 4:3: “If it is the anointed priest who has incurred guilt, so that blame falls upon the people, he shall offer for the sin of which he is guilty a bull, etc.” By raising the theme of the poor man's gift, and the impoverishment of Abba Yudan, the cluster of three tales in *Lev. Rab.* 5.4, in itself framed by the Proverbs verse, shares with the triad of tales from chapter 3 a direct reference to the theme underlying Leviticus 5:7–13, formally not the leading verse for either chain of tales, namely, the sacrifices of those who cannot afford sacrificing what the Law primarily demands, such as sheep – in which an intra-Levitical transformation downgrading the demand from sheep, via pigeons to the cream of wheat, is suggested. These alternative, less costly sacrifices appeared in chapter 3, the birds of the poor man and the cream of wheat of the woman. But Abba Yudan too is facing a situation where he cannot afford what his moral obligation is according to his own standard. It is his wife who assists him in performing a downgrading transformation, in the spirit of Leviticus 5:7–13, as demonstrated in *Lev. Rab.* 3.5. By the structural parallel the text, true to rabbinical textual ideology, proves that the transformation of unaffordable to affordable, and thus also of unrealistic to realistic, is included in the Torah text itself, thus implicitly including and legitimizing the rabbinical transformation from sacrifice to support of the rabbis.¹³

The same is also encompassed in the transformation of the access to the divine from the “direct” avenue on the *axis mundi* of the temple sacrifices to the more complex and mediated form of Torah learning. I suggest that both efforts to reestablish the connection with the divine source of abundance that rabbinic literature has devised for most Jews, synagogue service and Torah learning – in contrast to miracles that are reserved for the select few (Hasan-Rokem 2009, focusing on the Hanina ben-Dosa narratives in *b. Ta'an.* 24b–25a, and references to scholarship there) – are painfully “competing” with the “shortcut” suggested by the different transformations that Christianity offers to the sacrifices of the temple through the gift of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the anointed.

The perspective of narrative dialogue further illuminates the particular context of rabbinic literature and early Christian texts. In Acts 4 we hear about the individual donations to support the church of the believers:

³²Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means son of encouragement). ³⁷He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The utopian tone of the church in its emergence, where allegiance is absolutely total, is not echoed in the *Leviticus Rabbah* tales that explicitly condone the bird-catcher's sacrifice of half of his catch rather than all of it, and Abba Yudan's sale of half of his last piece of land to enable his contribution to the rabbis. While we do not know if and how many fields Joseph the Levite still had left after he had sold one for the church's benefit, it is quite clear that the early church's collective sharing is not matched in the rabbinic case where a social stratification between rabbis and their supporters, and even inside the rabbinical group itself, seems to endure at least to a certain degree, based on the level of erudition and halakhic savvy (Hezser 1997: 270ff.).

Peter Brown has, in his distinguished work on the social and religious life of late-antique people (e.g., Brown 2002; 2005), especially but not only Christians, devoted much thought and research to the questions discussed here, as shown in Ilana Silber's essay in the present volume critically comparing Brown's work with Paul Veyne's work on Greco-Roman euergetism (Veyne 1990). As Silber rightly asserts: "Both [Brown and Veyne] agree that patterns of Christian giving as they started to take shape from the third century on in the context of the Roman Empire stood in contrast with 'euergetism,'..." (Silber, this volume: 205). The story of Abba Yudan in *Leviticus Rabbah* is illuminated by Brown's reflection on the implications of the choice of a lifestyle of religious devotion on the economical situation of individuals, especially among Christians in the Roman Empire:

Whether as "apostles" and later as clergy, or (in certain cases in the third and fourth centuries) as rabbis and their disciples, both Christianity and Judaism drew on the dedication of persons who ... had never enjoyed the guaranteed leisure of the truly rich. They could renounce whatever livelihood they had and live (like the poor) from the gifts of others. Or they could balance, as best they could, the demands of a modest employment with the heavy demands of total dedication to things of God. In pursuing their dedication, they expected to receive encouragement, protection, even (eventually) regular financial support from their fellow believers, on whose behalf they were engaged in time-consuming religious activity. Their weight was to be borne by the ordinary wood and trellis-work of wealth provided by the less-expert rank and file of believers. (Brown 2002: 22)

Explicitly comparing clerics and rabbis, Brown makes the following observation:

The Christian clergy, as we know, made similar claims for themselves, even more persistently than did the rabbis. Throughout the early centuries of the Christian church, the clergy expected tax exemptions in exchange for prayers in behalf of the Roman armies. They also expected to be largely supported by the offerings of the faithful. (Brown 2005: 521)

However, Brown notes, this is rather scantily documented in the literature of the church.

Brown's analysis has an unmistakable bearing upon the situation reflected in the story of Abba Yudan, where "our masters (rabbis)" stand for those expecting to receive regular financial support from their fellow believers, whereas Abba Yudan clearly represents the "less-expert rank and file believers" providing for the former. In the wider historical process of the consolidation of economical support for a professionalized class of religious experts that Brown delineates, the Abba Yudan tale thus communicates a *modus vivendi* that has been reached in a situation when members of "the Rabbinic class" (Levine 1985: 69–71, referring to two of the *Lev. Rab.* 5.4 tales on p. 70) do not all enjoy the affluence of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi ("the Prince") (Hezser 1997: 267ff. preferring the term "the Rabbinic movement"; Meir 1999: 243–47; cf. Klein 1912: 545–50), or are not conceptualized as having recourse to the kinds of miracles that had befallen Hanina ben-Dosa and a small elect number of his contemporaries (Hasan-Rokem 2009, and references there).

The sociocultural parallels between Christians and Jews pointed out by Brown are also echoed in the narrative dialogue between the two groups. Thus, a close, although ideologically completely reversed, plot to the Abba Yudan tale appears at the beginning of Acts 5:¹⁴

¹But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; ²with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³"Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" ⁵Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. ⁶The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. ⁷After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter said to her, Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

The host of interpretations that this story has accumulated reveals a strong need to understand the nature of Ananias's and Sapphira's offense, often motivated by an open feeling of disproportion between it and the punishment. Whereas this problem is of no relevance for the *Leviticus Rabbah* story, the various suggested solutions connecting the event with Greco-Roman (Ascough 2000; Harrill 2011) and above all Qumranic (Capper 1983; Havelaar 1997; Taylor 2001) or Judean (Capper 2008) practices is of some relevance if one seeks to establish a continuous tradition between the Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and rabbinic literature. None of the rabbinic tales analyzed here presupposes a community of goods but rather voluntary sharing of private property as fulfillment of a religious commandment.

The defensive attack of the rather violent tale reflects a socioreligious entity in a phase when it is still struggling for existence and thus propagates its emergent power with disproportionate energies. In comparison, the rabbinic tale, whether in direct reference to the tale of Ananias and Sapphira or not is hard to prove, resonates a *longue durée* of a regime relatively void of political power but with a considerable sense of cultural legitimacy and authority, backed up by the textual institution of the Torah. The magical power of the everyday God of *Leviticus Rabbah*, who does not seem to hesitate to fell a poor cow for the enrichment of Abba Yudan¹⁵ is outweighed by the vengeance of the God of Peter, or may, chronologically speaking, actually be a refinement of it. In Abba Yudan's case the partial gift is instantly reciprocated; in Ananias and Sapphira's tale the halving of the gift has a fatal outcome. The religious impetus revealed in the story of Acts is one that enters into the game to win it all, as soon will happen, rather than devising strategies for subsistence, as in the rabbinic tale; and the genre of the moral tale of gift-giving applied in both is adapted to the political needs of the respective authoring establishments. My conclusions here could thus not agree more with Silber's cogent formulation: "This potent mix of interests and disinterestedness is thus also what enables the gift to operate as a vector for the symbolic constitution of personal and collective identities, and thereby penetrate as well as shape power dynamics and the public sphere" (Silber, this volume).

Conclusion

Gift-giving in the narratives discussed above does not only perform individual transformations from proud to meek, from poor to rich, but also collective transformations. From sacrifice to gift-giving, from gift-giving to sacrifice, sometimes even human – the language of sacerdotal giving in its peculiar everyday-life tone is shared by rabbinical Jewish and early Christian literature. In both contexts it is possible to witness a transformation of sacrifice to sacerdotal gifts, not superseding sacrifice in favor of purely spiritual values such as suggested in some New Testament texts (e.g., Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5), but rather in the spirit of Hebrews 13:16, quoted by Veayne as follows: "The Epistle of the Hebrews says that doing good is equivalent to a 'sacrifice'" (Veayne 1990: 32).

I have in this article made an attempt to demonstrate the quite systematic work of rabbinical texts on questions of gift-giving, with special reference to the interrelationship between sacrifice and sacerdotal giving materialized as support to the rabbis, further reinforcing “the sense of deep affinity and interpretation, even mutual embedment of the two kinds of gift-processes” (Silber 2002: 295). Although the third kind of gift-giving in Silber’s model, “charitable giving,” has not been discussed in detail in this paper, it does appear in *Leviticus Rabbah*, although perhaps due to the absence of the same amount of social tension involved in it, not as elaborately narrated as the two other kinds. Take, for example, *Lev. Rab.* 34.2: “Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Reuven [said]: ‘Whosoever gives a penny (*prutah*) to the poor, the Holy One Blessed be He gives him a penny. Is it a penny he gives? It is rather his soul (*nefesh*) that he gives’” (Margalioth 1972: 774–75). In this text the relationship of every act of charity with sacrifice and sacerdotal giving is thus reconfirmed by highlighting the term *nefesh*.

All in all, I have not tried to imply that the rabbis somehow foresaw the contemporary theoretical discussion on gifts and sacrifices but rather that the suggested historically and ethnographically informed literary interpretation of rabbinic texts demonstrates the validity of the discussion in those terms.

Notes

- 1 The valuable research assistance for this article by Matthijs den Dulk and Sharon Katz was enabled by my affiliation with the University of Chicago’s Divinity School in the spring of 2010 and the Scholion Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Jewish Studies at the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2008–2011. The article also pays homage to an unforgettable graduate seminar conducted by Peter Brown in his home on Josephine Street in Berkeley, California, in the academic year of 1982–1983, on rituals of death. I thank Daniel R. Schwartz for a wisely sobering reading of this text and for his comments; any remaining signs of inebriation are *mea culpa*. Valuable help by Reuven Kiperwasser is much appreciated. The volume *Was 70AD a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple* (ed. Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss in collaboration with Ruth A. Clements; Leiden: Brill, 2012) arrived too late for me to include its rich materials in the present article. The contributions, especially of Martha Himmelfarb, Michael D. Swartz, and Michael Tuval, will be addressed in future discussions. I was introduced to the topic of gifts in *Leviticus Rabbah* in the first class on midrash that I took at the Hebrew University, taught by Jacob Elbaum, whom I thank for his wisdom and friendship by dedicating this article to him.
- 2 The Hebrew Bible translations are from *JPS Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008 [1985]), unless otherwise indicated. The New Testament translations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 A comprehensive history of the word *nefesh* from the ancient Semitic languages to post-biblical Hebrew can be found in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, IX, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Joseph Fabry; trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 491–519. On p. 515, Leviticus 2:1 is mentioned as one of the instances where the word means “human person, someone” as

- a more abstract juristic term rather than the collective *adam* or the gender-exclusive *iš*. The meaning of *nefeš* as “life” in sacrificial contexts is attested on p. 514, e.g., Leviticus 17:17 and Deuteronomy 12:23. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 178–79; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1447–85.
- 4 Translations from rabbinic sources, unless otherwise indicated, are mine. The very few manuscript variations discussed rely on C. Milikowsky and M. Schlüter, synopsis of the manuscripts of *Leviticus Rabbah*. Available online at <http://www.biu.ac.il/js/midrash/VR/editionData.htm>. [Accessed September 2102]
 - 5 Rabbinical sources about King Agrippa often associate him with matters of the temple in Jerusalem and its rituals: *m. Bik.* 3.4; *m. Soṭah* 7.8; *y. Šeqal.* 5.4 (48d); and *b. Yoma* 20b; *b. Pesah.* 88b; 107b; *b. Ketub.* 17a; *Sem.* 11.6. See also S. Schwartz 2010: 102, who in this work puts *energesia* at the center of his historical model and refers to Josephus’s comparison of Herod and Agrippa as practitioners of public generosity to the advantage of the latter.
 - 6 I deliberately emphasize the affinity of the Hebrew and the Greek terms for “acts” worthy of telling.
 - 7 See also the consequent prohibition of the eating of blood motivated by its being the life principle or the soul: *ha-dam hu ha-nefeš* (Deuteronomy 12:23). Although most English versions translate *nefeš* here as “life,” see the LXX ὅτι τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ψυχῇ, and the Vulgate *sanguis enim eorum pro anima est*.
 - 8 The initial text presenting the transposition is followed in an intriguing combination by one of the most bizarre rabbinical demonological legends, situated in the antediluvian world. All three tales in the chain of *Lev. Rab.* 5.4 appear in a similar exegetical context in the Palestinian Talmud *y. Hor.* 3.6, *Talmud Yerushalmi* 2001: 1427–28.
 - 9 The upper, more private rooms of houses seem to have a special narrative function in Palestinian rabbinical narratives. Cf. *Lev. Rab.* 20.3 and the discussion in Hasan-Rokem 1987; see also Shinan 1994 discussing *Lev. Rab.* 16.2. Cf. Origen 1990: 143, a spiritual interpretation of Peter’s withdrawal to pray in an upper part of the house in Joppa, followed by the vision commanding him to eat of the ritually unclean animals (Acts 10:11–16).
 - 10 Cf. the rabbinical idiom *beyto hi isto* (“his home is his wife,” or also, “his wife is his home” (*y. Yoma* 1.1). It is possible that the clause “he went up to his house” in this tale also alludes to this meaning.
 - 11 Cf. the idiom “For my benefit was the leg of my cow broken” in the biographical legend about Rabbi Eliezer in *Bereshit Rabbah* 1996: 397–98, chapter 41 (42), 1. Stein 2004: 115–68 emphasizes the relationship between the episode and the saying and Torah learning.
 - 12 Parallels to all three tales in this paragraph appear, as mentioned above, in *y. Hor.* 3.6 and in a different version in *Deut. Rab.* 4.5; they are omitted by Lieberman in his edition. See his note on p. 94. The first (Abba Yudan) tale is retold in several medieval versions: Rabbi Nissim of Kairwan, *Hibbur yafeh me-ha-yeshuah*, translated into Hebrew from the Arabic by H.Z. Hirschberg, p. 88; see also Nissim Ben Jacob Ibn Shāhīn 1977, p. 150; Moses Gaster, *Exempla of the Rabbis*, § 417 p. 160, only in the English part; Israel Elnekaweh, *Menorat Ha-Maor*, ed. Enelow (New York: 1939), 1:86.
 - 13 I am not sure that I dare to suggest that there is an instance of intertextuality to these two triads of narratives in Origen’s homily 3.8 on Leviticus 2:5 correlating between the *solet* of Leviticus and a field, where he also refers to Matthew 13:23: “But he who

received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (NKJV) (Origen 1990: 68).

- 14 It is my pleasure to thank again Dr. Haim Weiss, who some years ago reminded me of the connection between the two texts.
- 15 Note that in true folk narrative spirit the miracle happens to the “righteous layman” rather than to the sophisticated rabbis; after all God could have sent the treasure straight to the rabbis, but that would have produced a rather ineffective narrative!

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Further Reading

The article addresses the rabbinic reflection on the transposition from a temple- and sacrifice-centered culture to a textual-study-centered culture and the transformation of gifts accordingly. The idea that there was a systematic transformation from sacrifices to other modes of sacerdotal giving in late antiquity, that is, post-70 Judaism, has often been addressed in the context of the role of the priests in rabbinic society, since the status of *kohen* did not disappear from the social order of Jews in Palestine and later elsewhere. See, for

example, Hezser 1997: esp. 268–69; and Levine 1985: esp. 71. A more general attempt to analyze religious phenomenology in the waning of the culture of sacrifice is Stroumsa 2009. Gift-giving in the rabbinic society of late antiquity has been treated in a historical perspective as well as in textual articulations in Satlow 2005 and 2010. S. Schwartz 2010 analyzes three cases, Josephus, Ben-Sira, and the Palestinian Talmud, focusing on the culture of reciprocal gift-giving. Christian practices that are relevant for the last case, and are comparatively highlighted in the present article, have famously been studied in Brown 2002 and 2005. Flusser 1988 provides the classical background for the Christian context of Palestinian rabbinic literature.

The topic of gift-giving is in this article viewed as a process of transformation articulated in sophisticated forms in rabbinic narratives linked to exegetical passages pertaining to biblical texts on the one hand, and to historical figures on the other hand, expressing the characteristic hermeneutical operations of rabbinic narratives triangulating history, text, and an existential moment of experience. The poetics of rabbinic narratives have been discussed along those lines in, for example, Hasan-Rokem 2000 and 2003. A pioneering study of the structural poetics of the particular genre of homiletic midrash, to which the tales here analyzed belong, is Heinemann 1971. Another useful reading for becoming acquainted with the text on which the article focuses, *Leviticus Rabbah*, including a comparative perspective, is Visotzky 2003. A broader perspective on one of the persons appearing in the tales is D.R. Schwartz 1990.

Finally, pertinent introductions to the general theory of gift-giving in its ethnographic, anthropological, and sociological perspectives have been offered, for example, by Mauss and Hubert 1964 and Silber 2002.

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